

TAUNTON'S

Guide to Pies and Tarts

MAY 2001 NO. 44

# C fine COOKING

FOR PEOPLE WHO LOVE TO COOK

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slow-sautéed  
vegetables

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fresh thyme

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# fine COOKING®

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**On the cover:** *Classic Meat Lasagna*, p. 34.

Cover photo, Mark Thomas.

These pages: clockwise from top left, Amy Albert; Scott Phillips; Mark Thomas; Sarah Jay.



70 Learn the secrets of baking moist pound cakes.





**Carolyn Weil** ("Pound Cakes," p. 70) was the first pastry chef at Jeremiah Tower's groundbreaking restaurant, Stars, in San Francisco. After Stars, Carolyn opened her own bakery in Berkeley, California—The Bakeshop—which received local and national acclaim. She now focuses on making baking approachable for home cooks by teaching, writing, and appearing on radio and television. She is a founding member of The Bakers Dozen, a group of bakers and pastry chefs across the country who collaborate on baking research and are writing a cookbook scheduled for publication this fall. Carolyn is writing the chapter on pie and fruit desserts.

docket, including a sequel to the recently published *Sephardic Flavors: Jewish Cooking of the Mediterranean* (Chronicle).

**Elinor Klivans** ("Lace Cookies," p. 54) studied pastry in France at La Varenne and at Ecole Lenôtre and baked the desserts for a restaurant in her hometown of Camden, Maine, before turning her attention fully to writing and teaching. Her books include *Bake & Freeze Desserts*, *Bake & Freeze Chocolate Desserts* (both from Broadway), and *125 Cookies to Bake, Nibble & Savor* (Bantam). Elinor's latest book, *Fearless Baking: Over 100 Recipes That Anyone Can Make* (Simon & Schuster), is due out this September.

**Abigail Johnson Dodge** ("Pie & Tart Guide," p. 26) is a contributing editor to *Fine Cooking*, as well as its test kitchen director. The author of *Great Fruit*



*Desserts* (Rizzoli) and *The Kid's Cookbook* (Williams-Sonoma), Abby is at work on a baking book, due out from Williams-Sonoma in the spring of 2002.

**Clifford A. Wright** ("Lasagna," p. 34), won the James Beard Foundation/KitchenAid Cookbook of the Year in 2000



for his 800-page opus, *A Mediterranean Feast* (William Morrow). He's also the author of several books on Italian cuisine, including one of his favorites, *Lasagne* (Little Brown). Cliff's next book, called *Mediterranean Vegetables*, is due out this fall from Harvard Common Press.

**Leslie Revsin** ("Slow-Sautéed Spring Vegetables," p. 40) honed her cooking skills in the kitchen of the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel, where she was the first woman chef, and later became the chef-owner of

Restaurant Leslie, a New York City bistro. She's the author of *Great Fish, Quick* (Doubleday), which was a finalist for a Julia Child award, and is working on her second cookbook. Leslie is a frequent contributor to *Fine Cooking*.

**Randall Price** ("Sole Meunière," p. 46) was working as a chef in Ohio when a chocolate cake changed his life: he entered a *Chocolatier* recipe contest, won a pastry course at La Varenne in Paris, and from there launched a career in Europe as a chef, caterer, and teacher, including several years as chef to the U.S. ambassador to Hungary. Randall currently consults and teaches at La Varenne's Château du Fëy and cooks for private clients in Paris and the Auvergne.

**Joyce Goldstein** ("Chicken Soup," p. 48) is an award-winning chef, a prolific cookbook author, and a cooking teacher with 35 years of experience. She



was chef-owner of the Mediterranean restaurant Square One in San Francisco for twelve years, during which time she won a James Beard award for best chef in California, and before that was the chef at the Café at Chez Panisse. Joyce has written seventeen cookbooks and has more on the

**Barbara Hom** ("Appetizers Add Up To a Festive Meal" p. 58) is the chef-owner of the prestigious Night Owl Catering in California's wine country,



and she travels around the world as a consultant. Local winemakers often call on Barbara to create wine dinners and cater special events, and hotels as far away as Thailand hire her for food and wine pairing classes. In 2002, when a new Sheraton Hotel opens in Petaluma, she will be its executive chef and food and beverage manager. Barbara learned to cook from her father, who was a master chef in China, and she later studied under Giuliano Bugialli in Italy and apprenticed in France and Greece.

**Michael Yeamans** ("French Fries" p. 65), is the executive chef at Rouge in Philadelphia. A graduate of Johnson & Wales Culinary School in Providence, Rhode Island, Michael had previously worked his way up from line cook to sous chef at Philadelphia's renowned all-fish restaurant, Striped Bass.

**Susie Middleton** ("Spatulas," p. 68) has an entire utensil jar filled with spatulas (sixteen at last count)—and that's not including the plastic ones. When she's not at work as executive editor of *Fine Cooking*, she's flipping, turning, or lifting something yummy in her kitchen or on her grill.



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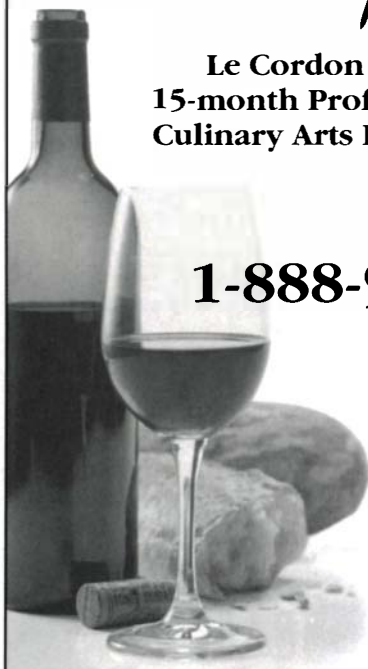
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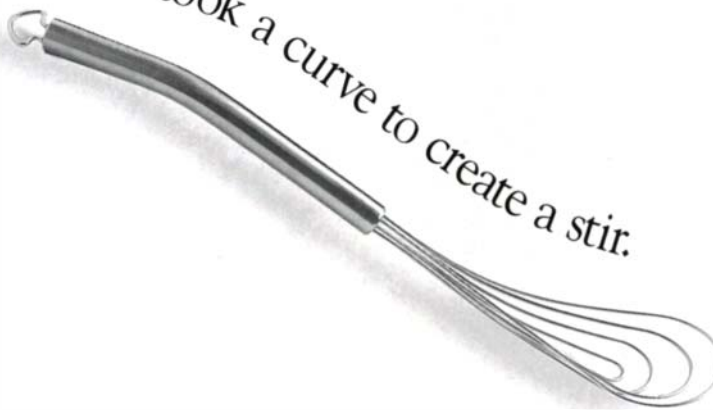
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Here's the place to share your thoughts on our recent articles or your food and cooking philosophies. Send your comments to Letters, *Fine Cooking*, PO Box 5506, Newtown, CT 06470-5506, or by e-mail to [fc@taunton.com](mailto:fc@taunton.com).

## Contests and cooking classes

It's time to start making plans to join us in California on our third annual California Experience. This year, we're featuring new events and artisans, including a dine-around at famed chef Charlie Palmer's new Hotel Healdsburg, and two special "pre-tour" hands-on classes. See the ad on p. 27 for details and information on getting a brochure.

It's also time to crank up your creativity and enter our first recipe contest for *Fine Cooking* readers. We want a chance to see how you cook and to share your best techniques with the rest of the *Fine Cooking* community of passionate cooks. The details are on pp. 16-17.

## Flipping tortillas in the Philippines

The Spanish tortilla was a favorite dish in our home. I grew up in the Philippines (a colony of Spain for 400 years), and there we called this dish *torta*. My mother prepared her potato tortilla exactly as described in Sarah Jay's article (*FC* #43, p. 64); the only difference was that she used banana leaves (a staple in Southeast Asian cooking) as a pan liner to keep the *torta* from sticking to the pan. We didn't have nonstick pans then and often used a *kawali* (wok) in which to cook the *torta*. The *torta* slid off the pan and onto the plate every time. The banana leaves also gave a wonderful aroma to the potato, onion, and egg mixture as it cooked. Another

version of *torta* in the Philippines used sautéed ground beef, diced potatoes, onions, garlic, and raisins, which were then folded into the beaten egg mixture. Thank you for a fine article.

—Carol Ojeda-Kimbrough,  
San Gabriel, CA

## An antacid for the sauce?

May I add to the sugar-in-tomato sauce debate? Your reader writes that her Sicilian father puts sugar in his tomato sauce to "cut down the acid from the tomatoes." In fact, sugar does no such thing. Sugar merely adds sweetness, which can balance the acid but won't neutralize or reduce it. If your tomatoes have produced an acidic tomato sauce, the solution is to add a basic ingredient, like a pinch (and I mean just a pinch) of baking soda. Try it—it really works!

—Janet Fletcher, author of  
Pasta Harvest, via e-mail

## Wellington made easier

I bought *FC* #42 for the cookies, which I haven't had a chance to make yet, but I did make the Beef Wellington (p. 38). It was excellent.

A tip for streamlining the assembly: make a template for cutting out the corners. I just traced a circle the same size as the pastry circles onto a piece of waxed paper and folded it in quarters to find the center. Then I marked the 4x3-inch rectangle and cut out the corners, creating a cross-shaped template—easier than having to measure each circle.

—Evelyn Sias, via e-mail

## Do I smell something fishy?

I read with interest your article on salt cod (*FC* #42, p. 61). The process described, how-



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ever, sounds suspiciously like that for *lutefisk*, the wretched stench of which drove me from the house in Michigan's Scandinavian Upper Peninsula as a boy. Granted, *lutefisk* is preserved with lye instead of salt (I believe) but that should make no difference after the two-day soaking.

I would very much like to try the recipe for the Salt Cod Fritters, but only if I can be assured that they will not reek as the *lutefisk* did. Please tell me: Is there any "fishy" smell asso-

ciated with the preparation of this fish? Bear in mind that a fishiness that is acceptable to you will likely be overwhelming to me. With many thanks.

—Charlie Rose, Boulder, CO

**Editors' reply:** We asked Abby Dodge, our test kitchen director, how she felt about the fragrance of the salt cod during the recipe testing. "Personally, I didn't care for it," was her diplomatic reply. "On a scale of 1 to 10 of smelliness, it was about a 5." Not having ever

### Getting the most from *Fine Cooking's* recipes

When you cook from a *Fine Cooking* recipe, we want you to get as good a result as we did in our test kitchen, so we recommend that you follow the guidelines below in addition to the recipe instructions.

Before you start to cook, read the recipe completely. Gather the ingredients and prepare them as directed in the recipe list before proceeding to the method. Give your oven plenty of time to heat up; use an oven thermometer to check.

Always start checking for doneness a few minutes before the time given in the recipe; use an instant-read thermometer.

In baking recipes especially, the amounts of some ingredients (flour, butter, nuts, etc.) are listed by weight (pounds, ounces) and by volume (cups, tablespoons). Professional bakers measure by weight for consistent results, but we list volume measures too because not many home cooks have scales (although we highly recommend them—see *Fine Cooking* #13, p. 68, and #17, p. 62).

To measure flour by volume, stir the flour and then lightly spoon it into a dry measure and level it with a knife; don't shake or tap the cup. Measure liquids in glass or plastic liquid measuring cups.

Unless otherwise noted, assume that

- ◆ Butter is unsalted.
- ◆ Eggs are large (about 2 ounces each).
- ◆ Flour is all-purpose (don't sift unless directed to).
- ◆ Sugar is granulated.
- ◆ Garlic, onions, and fresh ginger are peeled.
- ◆ Fresh herbs, greens, and lettuces are washed and dried.

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**March 3–4:** *Fine Cooking* sponsors the Washington D.C. International Wine Festival at the Ronald Reagan Building & International Trade Center. Our booth will be manned by editors—waiting to meet you—and chefs Ris Lacoste and Brian Patterson will do demos. For info, call 800/343-1174 or visit [www.wine-expos.com](http://www.wine-expos.com).

**March 8–9:** Editors Martha Holmberg and Amy Albert teach classes in Texas based on favorite *Fine Cooking* recipes at the Central Market Cooking School in San Antonio (March 8) and in Austin (March 9). Call 512/470-9036 for info.

**March 24:** Editor Martha Holmberg travels to Burlington, Vermont, for cooking demos at The New England Culinary Institute's Commons restaurant. For information, call 802/764-1490 or e-mail [debbiet@neci.edu](mailto:debbiet@neci.edu).

**April 1:** Parents join their kids for a hands-on cooking class based on contributing editor and test kitchen director Abby Dodge's *Kid's Cookbook*, at The Book and The Cook Festival & Fair in Philadelphia. For information visit [bookandthecook.com](http://bookandthecook.com).

**May 9:** Contributing editor Molly Stevens teaches a class at the new Sur La Table in Manhasset, New York. Call 516/365-3297.

**Plus:** Jennifer Bushman demonstrates recipes from the pages of *Fine Cooking* on her "Nothing to It" television segments, airing on selected NBC and Fox stations in Nevada, Arizona, Wyoming, Montana, and Idaho.

had the pleasure of making or eating *lutefisk* (though she's certainly heard about it on *A Prairie Home Companion*), she can't compare odor levels. Salt cod is fairly strong smelling when first unwrapped and during the first few soakings (a good idea is to soak it in a heavy-duty zip-top bag instead of an open bowl), but once it's soaked and ready to cook, the odor is very mild, as is the flavor.

### Notes about recent recipes

Several readers have called to verify the directions in two recently published recipes. The recipes are correct as published, but we want to clarify that yes, there are 2 tablespoons baking powder in the Carrot Cake (*FC* #43, p. 62), and in the Soup of the Bakony Outlaws (#43, p. 34), the "more liquid to be added later" is the 1 cup sour cream and 1 cup heavy cream. ◆



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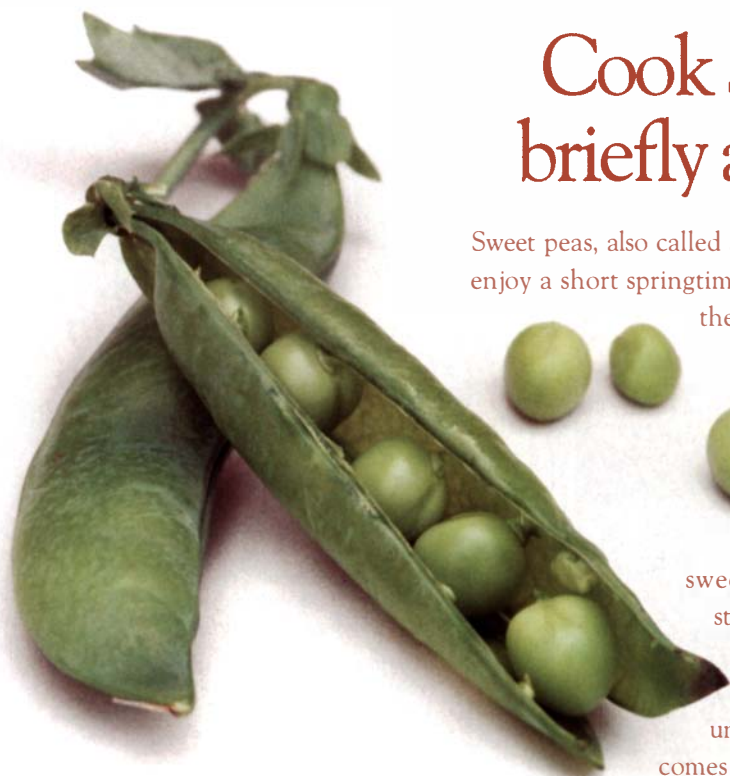
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## Cook sweet peas briefly and simply

Sweet peas, also called shelling peas or English peas, enjoy a short springtime run in most areas, so grab them while you can. Deborah Madison, a *Fine Cooking* contributor, advises picking pods that swell rather than bulge, a sign that the peas inside are mid-size and sweet, rather than oversize and starchy. Avoid yellowed pods or those that look dried out. Cook fresh peas briefly, just until heated through. When it comes to adding other flavors, fresh peas are versatile, but their sweet freshness is best shown off when you keep the preparation simple: toss warm peas with cultured butter, *crème fraîche*, or nut oil. I love puréeing them into the simple soup at right. For more on cooking sweet peas, see *Fine Cooking* #38, p. 44.



### Fresh Pea Soup

The color and flavor of this soup are cheery trumpeters of spring. *Serves four.*

- 4 lb. sweet peas (to yield about 4 cups shucked)**
- 2 Tbs. unsalted butter**
- 1 small onion, chopped**
- 3 cups homemade or low-salt chicken stock**
- 1¼ tsp. coarse salt, or to taste**
- Freshly ground white pepper to taste**
- 4 tsp. *crème fraîche***
- 2 tsp. chopped fresh mint**

Shuck the peas. In a large saucepan over medium heat, melt the butter. Add the onion and sauté until soft, 5 to 6 min. Try not to let it brown. Add the stock and salt, raise the heat, and bring the pot to a boil. Add the peas, cover, and return the pot to a boil. Lower the heat and simmer the peas until just cooked through, 2 to 5 min. depending on size. Transfer the peas and some of the liquid to a blender and purée until smooth. Add the remaining liquid and blend again. Pass through a coarse strainer or food mill. Serve warm, topping each bowl with 1 tsp. of the *crème fraîche* and ½ tsp. of the chopped mint.

## Delicate, mild white asparagus

Asparagus—especially white—used to be considered a sure sign of spring, but crops from South America are starting to show up year-round. White asparagus's lack of color comes from being grown under mounded earth, and you'll notice blunter tips and more fragile stalks than on green asparagus. Look for firm, fresh-looking stalks; pass on those that look woody, yellowed, brown, or dried out. To prepare white asparagus for cooking, bend the lower end of the stalk and discard what breaks off naturally, which is the tough bit. While green asparagus has a grassier, more pronounced flavor, white asparagus' milder flavor is best shown off when you cook it simply. Poach or steam it and then nap it with brown butter and crisped pancetta. Or drizzle it with garlic mayonnaise, pistachio or walnut oil, or a zippy mustard vinaigrette.





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### Seek out squeaky artichokes

If it feels heavy for its size and squeaks when squeezed, you've found a fresh artichoke. Brown spots on the outer leaves of winter artichokes are okay; they're simply a sign of frost. Artichokes are most plentiful in spring and again in fall. They require a bit of prep work, but the meaty texture and tangy-sweet flavor are worth it. For an appetizer or side dish, slice off the top third, snip the tough outside leaves, and steam whole artichokes stem side down; dip the outer leaves in butter. Or, trim the leaves and choke completely and parboil the bottoms for a flavorful sauté, a warming gratin, a soup, or a dip.



### Cook leeks thoroughly

Unlike its allium cousins—garlic, scallions, and onions—which you can eat raw, a leek must be cooked thoroughly or you'll have a tough, stringy result. Leeks grow in sandy soil and need thorough washing to get rid of the grit. Look for firm, green stalks with the roots still attached.

To cook, trim the root and dark green parts (but do save both for vegetable stock).

Chop leeks and sauté them with carrots and celery for the flavorful start to a braise, a stuffing, or a stew. Sweat them to purée for leek and potato soup. (Know that the sugars in leeks make them prone to sticking in the sauté pan if you don't use enough oil). Simmer whole leeks in chicken stock for a delicious side dish, served warm with a few grinds of black pepper or cold with a vinaigrette.



### Fiddlehead ferns

Fiddleheads take their name from the scroll on a violin; they're the head of the ostrich fern in its early stages of life. They have a nutty flavor that may remind you of asparagus. Look for brightly colored, tightly furled ones with brown wisps still clinging, and be sure they're not slimy. Fiddleheads make a brief appearance in the spring, so if you see them, pounce, and cook them soon after you get them home. Snip off the tail ends, blanch them briefly, and then rub them to remove the fuzzy brown wisps. Toss tender, young fiddleheads into a green salad with a lemon vinaigrette. Sauté more mature ones with a bit of olive oil and garlic.

—Amy Albert is an associate editor for *Fine Cooking*. ♦





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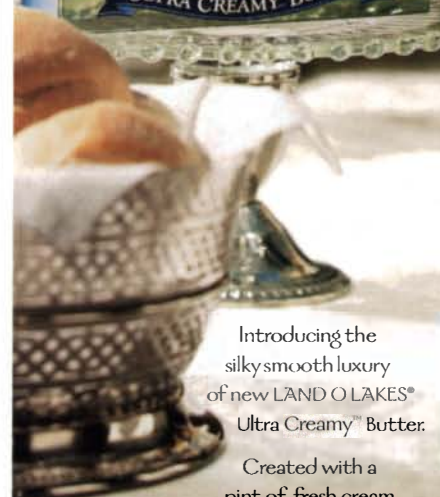
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# Enter *Fine Cooking's* first Recipe Contest

**W**e want to give all the passionate cooks in *Fine Cooking's* readership the chance to show their stuff by sharing their recipes with the *Fine Cooking* staff and other readers. So we've designed a contest with a "Market Basket Challenge" theme that will test your resourcefulness and creativity—the two most valuable assets a good cook can have. This contest is for enthusiasts only—no professionals in the cooking field, please.

## How the contest works

Create one recipe for a main dish to serve four to six that's appropriate for casual entertaining or a nice family meal. You need to select the ingredients for the recipe from our "market basket" and "pantry" lists below (plus you get some "wildcard" choices). By restricting your options, we're asking you to cook like the pros, letting the ingredients be your inspiration.

## The prizes

**The grand-prize winner:** Your recipe will be featured in *Fine Cooking*, with the option of having the photo shoot at your home, plus a five-piece set of heavy-gauge French copper pans.

**The three runners-up:** Your recipes will also appear in *Fine Cooking* and you'll each receive a three-piece professional-quality knife set.

## Here's how to create your main dish recipe for four to six:

1

### Use at least 4 out of these 5 market basket ingredients

3 to 4 lb. chicken pieces, or one 3- to 4-lb. whole chicken

Fresh mushrooms: choose from white, button, cremini, or portabella (any quantity)

Fresh thyme: any quantity

Tomatoes: choose from fresh, canned, or sun-dried (any quantity)

Cheeses: choose from Parmesan, Gruyère, or Pecorino (any quantity)

2

### Use any quantity of any of the following pantry ingredients

Butter, vegetable oil, olive oil, cream, milk, eggs, flour, cornstarch, garlic, onions, black pepper, salt, stock (beef, chicken, or vegetable), sugar, vinegar, water, white or red wine.

3

### Use up to 3 wildcard ingredients in the following categories in any amount

Any condiment, flavoring, wine or spirit, spice, herb, fruit, vegetable, starch, meat, fish, or poultry.





### The rules

- ◆ Create a main dish recipe serving four to six people, following the instructions at left.
- ◆ Type your recipe as clearly as possible.
- ◆ Write your recipe as descriptively as possible, paying close attention to how you explain the method, doneness tests, etc.
- ◆ Be sure to list ingredients in the order that you will use them in the recipe.
- ◆ Don't send photos or drawings.
- ◆ Cooking professionals are not eligible for this contest.

### The details

Winners will be notified by August 15, 2001, and winning recipes will be published in early 2002.

Contestants may submit one recipe only, and all recipes must be original. Winning entries become property of *Fine Cooking*, which may publish them without payment to the author. *Fine Cooking* will not be able to return any submissions. Contestants must be 18 or older and must not be a cooking professional. Employees of The Taunton Press and their families are not eligible to enter. This contest is void where prohibited, and no purchase is necessary.

### The deadline

All entries must be postmarked by **May 15, 2001**.

You may send your entries by mail or other delivery service, by fax, or by e-mail.

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203/426-3434; mark your entry clearly with "Fine Cooking Contest."

### E-mail to:

fc@taunton.com; list "contest" as the subject line.

### How we judge the recipes

We'll judge all recipes on how appealing the dish sounds, how well the recipe is written (as in how well you explain your techniques; don't worry about perfect spelling). The finalists' recipes will be judged on how well they work in the kitchen and how much the judges enjoy eating them.

### The judges

**Abigail Johnson Dodge** is a contributing editor and the test kitchen director for *Fine Cooking*. Abby trained at La Varenne in Paris and worked under French chefs Michel Guérard and Guy Savoy. She's the author of *Great Fruit Desserts* and *The Kid's Cookbook*.

**Molly Stevens** is a contributing editor for *Fine Cooking*. She trained at La Varenne in Paris and later became a chef-instructor at the New England Culinary Institute in Vermont. She wrote *New American Cooking: New England* and co-wrote the forthcoming *One Potato, Two Potato*.

**James Peterson**, a contributing editor for *Fine Cooking*, is a cookbook author and teacher. His many books include *Essentials of Cooking*, *Sauces*, and the forthcoming *Simply Salmon*.

**Katherine Alford** is a senior writer at The Food Network and the author of the forthcoming *Caviar, Truffles & Foie Gras*. She's the former director of instruction at Peter Kump's New York Cooking School.

**Eve Felder** is the Associate Dean for Advanced Cooking at the Culinary Institute of America at Hyde Park, New York. She's a former chef of Chez Panisse Café.

Have a question of general interest about cooking?

Send it to Q&A, *Fine Cooking*, PO Box 5506, Newtown, CT 06470-5506, and we'll find a cooking professional with the answer.

**How much alcohol is left after cooking?**

*I'm curious about how much alcohol remains in a dish after it has been flambéed or reduced by simmering. Is there a general assumption one can make in these situations?*

—Sherry Davenport, Littleton, MA

**Evelyn Augustin replies:** In 1990, several colleagues and I conducted a USDA-funded research study to investigate the long-held assumption that alcohol used in cooking evaporates, leaving the finished dish free of alcohol. Our results proved this assumption to be invalid.

term simmering for 2½ hours (beef burgundy); oven baking (scalloped oysters); flambéing (cherries jubilee); and simply adding alcohol to a hot sauce (Grand Marnier sauce).

The results showed that the rate of alcohol evaporation depends on several factors. The intensity of heat to which the food is exposed, the length of cooking time, and the surface area of the cooking vessel (a greater surface area equals greater evaporation) appear to have the most influence on evaporation. For example, the beef burgundy (which simmered for 2½ hours) showed the greatest evaporation, while the brandy Alexander pie (no cooking) and the cherries jubilee (quickly flambéed) showed the least. Chicken cooked in a 10-inch skillet retained more alcohol than the same recipe cooked in a 12-inch skillet.

Other factors affecting evaporation include exposure to air, the other ingredients used in the recipe, and at what stage the alcohol is added. Breadcrumbs, for instance, may absorb alcohol and protect it from heat. Adding alcohol to a sauce at the end of cooking results in little evaporation.

It's important to note that in all cases, the dishes retained at least some of their alcohol content. The alcohol retention, calculated on a per-serving basis, ranged from 0.2 gram for the beef burgundy to 3 grams for the brandy Alexander pie. (As a means for comparison, uncooked wine averages 9.3 grams per serving, while 90-proof spirits contain 15.9 grams.)

Given the number of variables at play here, there isn't really a general assumption that you can make about alcohol retention, other than that some will always remain. But knowing the factors that affect evaporation should help you to arrive at an educated guess.

*Evelyn Augustin is a professor emerita at Washington State University.*

**Technicolor garlic**

*When I cook with fresh garlic, it sometimes turns a bright blue or blue-green color. What causes this, and how can I prevent it from happening? The color is very unappealing, and I worry that it might be toxic.*

—Penelope Clark, Thunder Bay, Ontario

**David Stern replies:** The discoloration of fresh garlic that you describe is a longstanding mystery for both cook and chemist. As you read this, scientists are working to unravel the secrets of this chemical curiosity.

Although not yet fully understood, we do know some things about this phenomenon: The blue-green discoloration is most commonly seen when garlic is exposed to highly acidic conditions, typically caused by the presence of vinegar. The cause is believed to be a reaction between the vinegar (or other acidic ingredient) and the proteins or sulfites in the garlic. It has nothing to do with photosynthesis or chlorophyll. The reaction seems to occur more often with hardneck (topset) garlic varieties than with softneck types. When the reaction occurs



The study involved six recipes that were prepared using various kinds of alcohol (red wine, dry sherry, brandy, crème de cacao, and Grand Marnier) and different preparation methods. The methods were: an unbaked pie (brandy Alexander) that was refrigerated overnight; short-term simmering for 30 minutes (chicken burgundy); long-



with one garlic clove, it won't necessarily happen with all of the remaining cloves from the same bulb.

Our culture does indeed lack blue foods, but while it may be startling to behold, blue garlic is perfectly safe and delicious to eat. I don't know of any sure-fire way of preventing discoloration, but you might try reducing the amount of vinegar in the recipe or experimenting with other lower-acid ingredients, such as lemon juice or wine. *David Stern is a certified organic vegetable farmer and the director of the Garlic Seed Foundation, an organization of growers and eaters dedicated to the improvement and production of garlic.*

### Waxed paper is key to rolling out cookie dough

*When making rolled cookies, I've noticed that the third time I gather and re-roll the dough, it crumbles badly.*

*Is there anything I can do to prevent this? The first two times the dough rolls out fine.*

—Dave Ulrich, via e-mail

**Flo Braker replies:** The texture of cookie dough relies on a delicate balance between the flour, fat, and liquid in the dough. I suspect that you're using extra flour to help you roll the dough. By the third time you've gathered and rolled the scraps, the dough

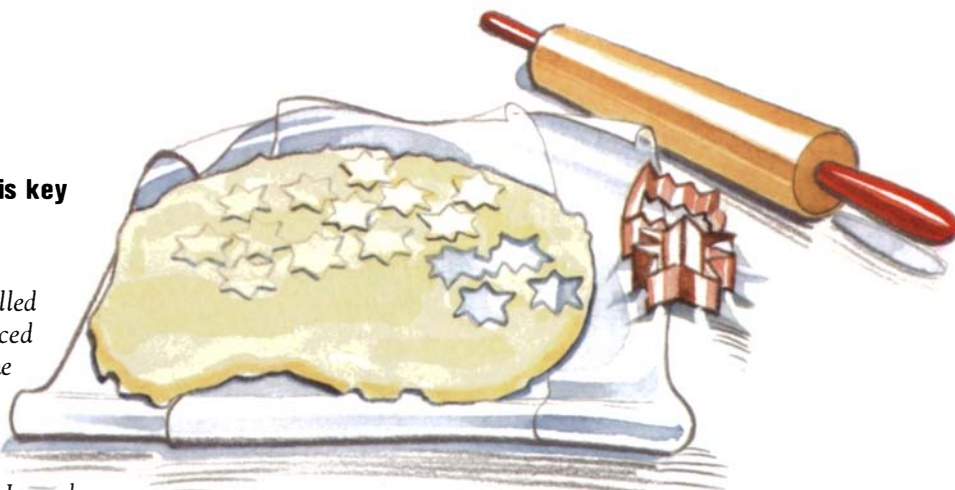
has absorbed too much flour and become crumbly because the balance of ingredients has been thrown off.

To prevent this, roll out your dough between two sheets of waxed paper instead of using flour. Don't use flour to coat your cookie cutters, either; use a thin coating of vegetable oil instead.

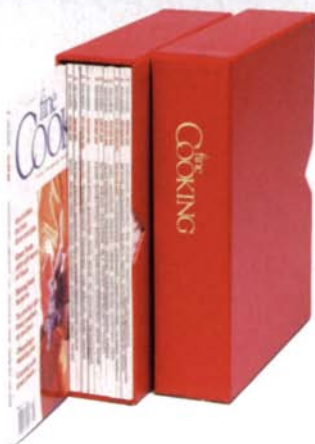
For the best texture, try to roll your scraps out as few

times as possible, and when you do roll, handle them gently to prevent gluten, which makes dough tough, from forming. To keep your scraps at a minimum, cut shapes close together, starting at the edges of the dough and working toward the center.

*Flo Braker is the author of The Simple Art of Perfect Baking (Chapters) and Sweet Miniatures (Chronicle).* ♦



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READER SERVICE NO. 96



## Big flavor in tiny grains of fennel pollen

Fennel pollen is nothing new in Tuscany, but here in the U.S., we're just beginning to learn about the appeal of this fragrant spice. The first time I smelled wild Italian fennel pollen, its powerfully familiar yet mysterious aroma immediately captivated me.

Praying that it tasted as good as it smelled, I started dreaming of inventive ways to cook with it. Then I remembered how often the simplest approach turns out to be the best, so I mixed a small amount of the pollen with coarse salt and freshly ground black pepper, and started sprinkling it

on whatever I happened to be cooking: roast pork and potatoes, baked chicken, grilled fish, even steamed cauliflower. I wasn't disappointed. The complex, sunny fennel flavor burst through in ways that fennel seed could never match.

You can order your own supply of wild Italian fennel pollen from Zingerman's (888/636-8162). Twenty dollars buys 45 grams (about ½ cup), and because a little of this stuff goes a long way, that should last you a while—unless you go as crazy for it as I did.

—Jennifer Armentrout, assistant editor

## Juicy handmade sausages by Caggiano

One of the tastiest finds at this year's California Experience (*Fine Cooking's* California artisanal food tour) was sausage made by the Caggiano Company of Sonoma. The delicious hand-linked sausages are made with natural pork and chicken (which contain no hormones or antibiotics) and are generously seasoned with fresh herbs and aromatic vegetables.

I was wowed by the Chicken Sausage with Roasted Garlic & Tarragon; it was moist, tender, and delicious, which is unusual for



chicken sausage—many are dry and bland. Caggiano makes about twenty varieties, including Pork & Lamb Sausage with Arugula and Red Wine, Chicken-Parmesan Sausage with Sun-Dried Tomatoes, and Maple-Pecan Breakfast Sausage. Smoked and spicy sausages are available, too; the andouille is a fine example of that Cajun classic.

Try Caggiano sausage in stews (the garlic sausage would ennoble any cassoulet); add it to pasta, stuffings, risottos, *arroz con pollo*, or paella. And for a weeknight dinner, savor these links plain and simple: seared, grilled, or roasted and then nestled alongside a lentil salad or atop a bed of mashed potatoes. Caggiano Sausages are sold at many Bay Area specialty markets, or you can mail-order them from the Caggiano Company by calling 707/765-2849.

—Amy Albert, associate editor

## Stainless pot cleaner that really works

I wouldn't have believed it until I tried it, but a product from the Siege Chemical Company works miraculously on getting rid of heat and water damage on stainless-steel pots and pans. I tried Siege's Stainless Steel & Aluminum Cleaner on an All-Clad saucepan that I'd badly damaged by leaving it on the heat after the water had boiled out of it. I poured some directly in the pot and began rubbing with a paper towel. It took only a minute or two before the dark gray blotches on the metal began to disappear as the shiny stainless came back into view. I got the inside of the pot looking almost like new and then began working on the coppery-colored heat damage on the outside of the pot, which also began to disappear (although a bit more reluctantly).

The cleaner is designed to be used on pots and pans, but it can also be used on stainless-steel appliances, provided they're washed immediately afterward with hot soapy water.

A 12-ounce bottle, enough for several cleanings, costs \$6 and is available from [www.gourmetcatalog.com](http://www.gourmetcatalog.com) or by calling 877/445-0005

for the location of a store near you. You can also call Siege Chemical Company (602/265-3200) for more information on this and its other products, including a porcelain and enamel cleaner, a copper cleaner, a glass and ceramic stovetop cleaner, and a rust remover. —Susie Middleton, executive editor







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## Two tools to help you bake a better pie



For some of us, the hardest part of making a pie is rolling out the dough. Turning a lump of dough into an even 12- or 13-inch round can be a struggle, especially if you're somewhat spatially challenged like me. Happily, the artisans at Catskill Craftsmen, makers of butcherblock furniture and cutting boards, created a pastry board just for us.

The 16x22-inch beautifully crafted hardwood board is imprinted with various size markings, including circles for 8-, 9-, and 10-inch pies. My pie dough rolled out and released effortlessly from the smooth, oiled surface, but I did have to roll the dough slightly larger than the recommended size

to have enough overhang to work with. I also found the U.S. and metric rulers around the perimeter to be useful for any shaping or cutting task where size is important. The board costs \$23 plus \$6 shipping and is available online at [www.cooking.com](http://www.cooking.com) or by calling 800/663-8810.

After several readers wrote to us in praise of unglazed terra cotta and stoneware pie plates (Letters, *Fine Cooking* #38 and #39), I decided to try one for myself. I couldn't have been more pleased with the results. The porous nature of unglazed stoneware lets it absorb moisture and create an intensely dry heat, which is terrific for crusts. My pie crust turned out crisp yet flaky and tender, and it was beautifully browned, too. Just like our letter writers, I'm now sold on unglazed stoneware for baking.

If you try one of these pie plates, remember that stoneware conducts heat

a little differently than metal or glass, so be prepared to adjust baking times accordingly. My test pie cooked about 15 minutes faster than if it had been in a glass plate.

I found my pie plate through Chicago-based Sassafras Enterprises, manufacturers of a line of unglazed stoneware baking equipment that includes pizza and bread pans as



well as pie plates. You can order directly from the company or ask for a retailer near you (800/537-4941). My standard 9-inch pie plate cost \$15 plus \$4 shipping; a version with scalloped edges is also available, as are 11-inch pie plates.

—J. A.

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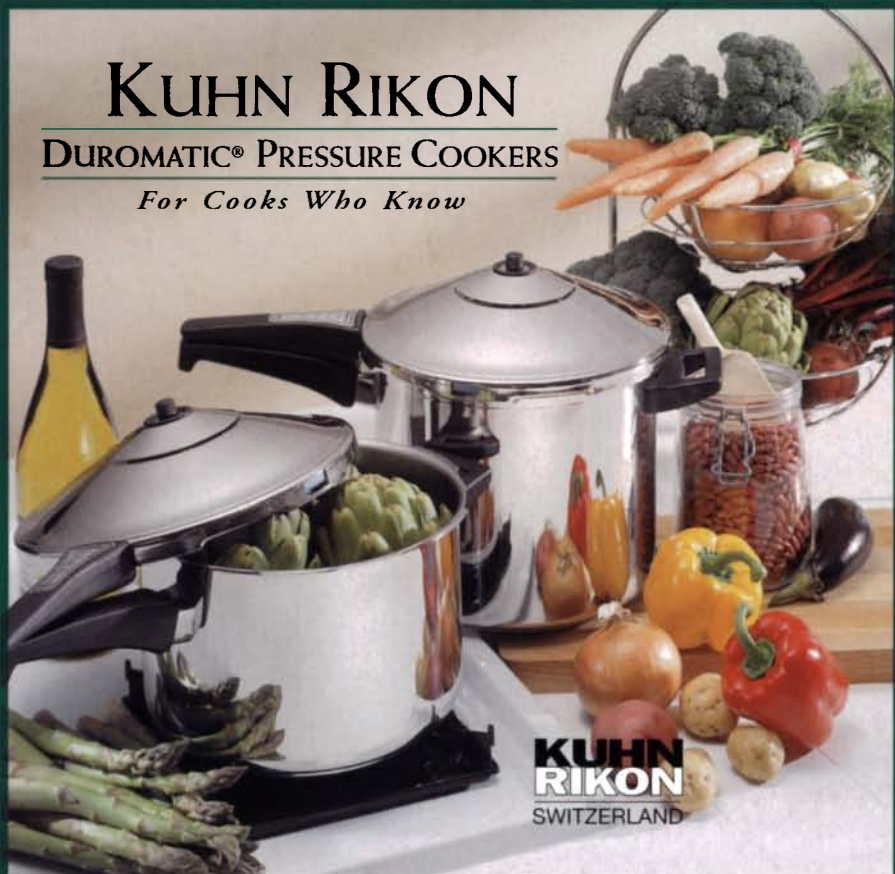
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READER SERVICE NO. 76



# Roasting a rack of lamb and making a *jus*

Many of us who haven't the slightest hesitation about roasting a leg of lamb are intimidated when it comes to roasting a rack of lamb. Much of our fear no doubt stems from the high cost of a rack of lamb and the pressure of cooking it just right, in contrast to the more forgiving leg, which ends up cooked to varying degrees—some parts rarer or more done than others—no matter how you roast it. But roasting a rack of lamb and making a *jus* (an unthickened gravy, pro-

## The loin end vs. the shoulder end



**Trim according to the end.** The shoulder end (left) needs to be trimmed more aggressively than the loin end (right).



nounced ZHOO) from the pan juices is actually a very simple process that ends with impressive results. Just follow these straightforward guidelines and you'll see that rack-roasting anxiety is completely unnecessary.

## Inspect the rack before you buy

The rack is the lamb's rib cage, and it's sold in several forms. The wholesale cut

that your butcher or supermarket buys, called a double rack, includes both sides of the rib cage connected by the backbone. After further butchering, the racks that you see for sale in the meat case generally include only eight ribs from one side of the lamb. An eight-rib rack will serve two to four people depending on the size of the rack (racks of lamb from New Zealand are typically much smaller

## Trim the rack for even roasting



**Shave the fat off the loin end,** leaving a  $\frac{1}{8}$ - to  $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch layer of fat covering the meat.



**Remove the thick layer of fat and the thin sheet of meat that covers the shoulder end.** Trim the remaining fat, again leaving a thin layer of fat covering the meat.



**The trimmed rack should have an even layer of fat.** If you cut too close to the meat, use a few scraps of fat as patches.



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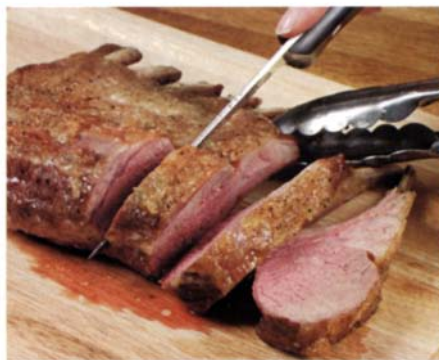
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## Give the rack a rest before carving



**For the most accurate temperature reading, insert the thermometer deep into the center of the meat.**



**When the lamb has rested and the jus is ready, carve the rack by slicing between the ribs.**

than American racks) and on the appetites of your guests.

**Beware the chine bone.** At the supermarket, you're likely to encounter a rack that's nothing more than a double rack that has been cut in half down the middle with a saw. You need to inspect the rack and make sure that the backbone (butchers call it the chine bone) has been sawed off, or that a series of cuts have been made into it between each rib. If the chine bone is left attached and no cuts have been made in it, the rack will be impossible to carve into individual chops.

If your store sells racks with the chine bone still attached, ask the butcher to remove it and chop it into pieces for you. At the same time, ask for a pound of lamb stew meat. You'll use the cut-up bone and the stew meat to supplement the juices released by the rack to make the jus.

The rack you buy may also have been "frenched." This is a purely decorative butchering task in which the fat and sinew are trimmed off the last two inches of the ribs. If the rack hasn't been frenched, you can ask the butcher to do it, you can do it yourself (see *Fine Cooking* #8, p. 43), or you can leave the ribs as they are.

**Pay attention to how well the rack has been trimmed.** A supermarket rack of lamb will likely be covered with a thick layer of fat. You can ask the counter person to trim it for you, but because butchering skills vary widely at supermarkets and because the rack is a costly cut, you might want to trim it yourself.

To ensure that the rack roasts evenly, more fat has to be trimmed off the shoul-

der end—the end with less regular pieces of meat interspersed with fat and sometimes a part of the shoulder blade—than off the loin end (see the photos on p. 24). Use a sharp knife and don't cut all the way to the shiny membrane, called the silverskin, that covers the meat. Save the trimmings. You'll want to separate the lean meat from the fat and add the meat scraps to the stew meat for supplementing the pan juices.

### Roasting the rack is as simple as sliding it into a hot oven

First, season the lamb amply with salt and pepper. You can also rub the rack

with other spices or chopped fresh herbs, such as rosemary or thyme.

Next, spread the extra meat and bones in a metal roasting pan or oven-proof skillet just large enough to hold the rack (I sometimes add a few garlic cloves at this point, too). The trimmings act as a roasting rack. Set the rack, fat side up, on top of the trimmings and pop it into a heated 425°F oven.

At 425°F, the rack will take 25 to 35 minutes to reach medium rare, the temperature at which it tastes best. It's done when the meat bounces back when you push the two ends together, or when an instant-read thermometer stuck in the middle of the meat registers 125°F.

When the rack is done roasting, put it on a cutting board—preferably one with a moat running around its sides to capture juices—and tent it with foil to keep it warm. While the lamb rests, make the jus (see the photos below). If the liquid evaporates too quickly while you're making the jus, you can add a little more broth or water. Just remember that it's better to have a small amount of concentrated jus than a large amount of watery jus.

*James Peterson is a contributing editor to Fine Cooking. His latest book, Simply Salmon (Stewart, Tabori & Chang), hits stores in May.* ♦

## Make the jus on top of the stove



**After removing the rack, set the pan on the stove and cook the stew meat and bones some more over medium-high heat until they're well browned and the juices have caramelized in the pan. Spoon off and discard the fat.**



**Add a cup of lamb, chicken, or beef broth or water and stir with a wooden spoon, scraping the bottom of the pan to release the caramelized juices. Simmer until the jus is well flavored. Strain the jus and serve it at the table in a sauceboat.**



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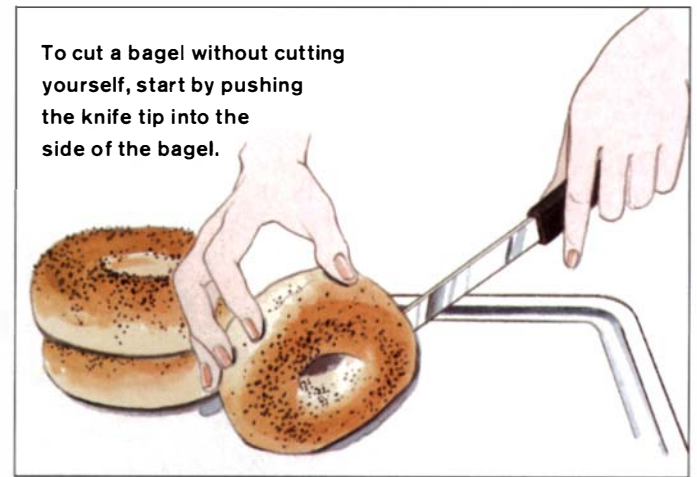
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## Cutting a bagel safely

To slice a bagel in half without risking a cut to your hand, place the bagel on its side on a sturdy cutting board and hold the top steady. With your other hand, push the point of a sharp knife into the top of the bagel below your fingers and use a sawing motion to slice the bagel in half.

—Christine Landi,  
Santa Ynez Valley, CA



To cut a bagel without cutting yourself, start by pushing the knife tip into the side of the bagel.

## Make cooking clean-up much faster and easier

All recipes tell you to have your ingredients measured out and ready to use before starting to cook. Since I live alone and have no dishwasher, I make clean-up easier by using paper muffin and cupcake liners, or the small, flat-bottomed paper cups you might find at water coolers, to hold ingredi-

new trash bag to soak up moisture from kitchen trash. A few sheets of newspaper also go into the bottom of the trash bin. This keeps the filled bag from dripping when I take it out of the kitchen.

—Thai Moreland,  
New York City, NY

bottle now looks neat and clean on my sink, and the convenient dispenser top never spills its contents.

—Evelyn Evans,  
Brewster, NY

## Make breadcrumbs from croissants

When I have a stale croissant or two, I freeze them in a plastic bag. Once frozen, they're easily made into crumbs by hitting the bag with a rolling pin or some other heavy object. I use the croissant crumbs to top gratins and baked pasta dishes or in a dish like meatloaf. The butter in the croissants makes for a crisp topping and for nice texture in the meatloaf.

—Darlene P. Sugiyama,  
Nanaimo, British Columbia

## New life for dried out vanilla beans

Here's a good way to revitalize those dry, brittle vanilla beans packaged in glass or plastic tubes that have been sitting on your pantry shelf for a while. Fill the tube—bean still inside—with light cream or half-and-half and let it soak in the refrigerator for a couple of days. The vanilla bean will soften up; it can then be split and scraped. The bonus is the vanilla-flavored cream, which you can use for coffee or for baking.

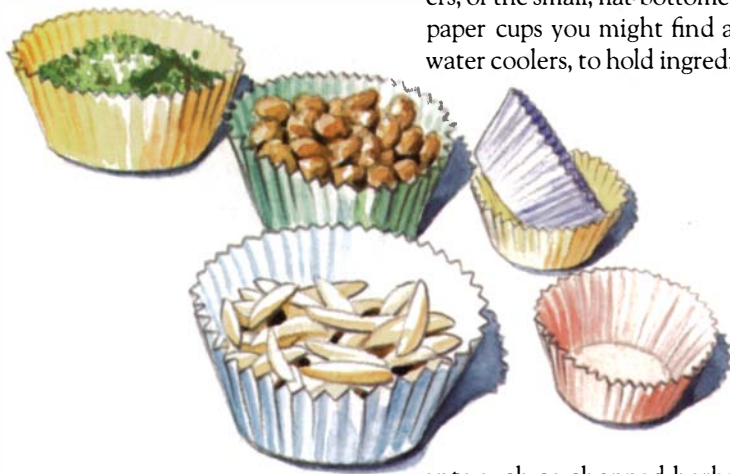
—Lawrence A. Davis,  
Langley, British Columbia

## A neat way to store dish detergent

Tired of the bottle of liquid dish soap—goopy and slippery with spilled detergent—that sat on my kitchen sink, I bought a small, empty plastic bottle with a pump dispenser top and filled it with dish detergent. The filled

## Blanching garlic helps peeling

To peel a few garlic cloves, I usually just press the side of a knife to crack the skin, but this can get tedious if I've got more than a dozen or so cloves to peel, especially if the cloves are very fresh and the skin is tight. For a lot of garlic cloves, I blanch them in boil-



Paper cupcake liners double as disposable prep cups.

ents such as chopped herbs, garlic, spices, etc. The little cups are even great for the small amounts of liqueur some recipes call for. After cooking, just throw the bits of paper away. This is a lot faster than having lots of little bowls to wash, dry, and put away.

—Al Politowski, Hoboken, NJ

## Old newspapers keep trash bags from dripping

When I empty the trash bin, I always put some folded newspapers in the bottom of the



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## TIPS

ing water for just 15 seconds, scoop them out, and then shock them in ice water. The skin slips right off.

—*Chef Robert Danhi, Culinary Institute of America, Hyde Park, NY*

### Toast your flour for better gravy

I brown my flour in a baking pan in the oven at 300°F for about 30 minutes, stirring or shaking the pan often. I remove the flour from the oven when it takes on a light brown color and toasty fragrance, let it cool, and store it in an airtight container. I use this toasted flour to thicken sauces and gravies; it gives them a deeper flavor and color and eliminates the taste of raw flour.

—*Janet C. deCarteret, Bellevue, WA*

### Use a roasting pan as a stovetop griddle

I use my nonstick, heavy-duty flameproof roasting pan on the stovetop as a griddle for breakfast foods such as pancakes, French toast, eggs, and breakfast meats. Straddled over two burners, the pan makes an efficient, extra large cooking surface that keeps the food contained while allowing it to brown. It also does a great job of browning chicken and pork chops.

—*Tiny Shuster, St. Johnsville, NY*

### Ask the butcher to score brisket

Some cuts of meat, such as brisket or flank and sirloin steak for London broil, must be sliced against the grain after cooking in order to be tender. One easy way to make

Set a roasting pan over two burners and you've got a stovetop griddle.



sure you get it right is to ask the butcher to score into the fat before he wraps the meat to indicate the direction in which you should start slicing.

—*Stanley Lobel, Lobel's Prime Meats, New York, NY*

### Decorate pastries with hard candies

Many people dust confectioners' sugar or cocoa onto desserts such as chocolate cakes and tortes. Another idea is to garnish a cake by dusting it with a sugar powder

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# TIPS



**For crisper results, use a wire-mesh splatter screen as a lid when making popcorn.**

made from grinding your favorite hard candy (such as toffee or peppermint) in a clean spice grinder.

—Adam Eisner, Hadley, MA

### Flavor meat pie pastry

I like to make beef or chicken

pot pies, and I often give a flavor boost to the dough by adding a pinch of chili powder or curry powder, or some toasted, chopped nuts or sesame seeds.

—Buffet Campbell, Agawam, MA

### Make crisper, theater-style popcorn at home

If you enjoy making old-fashioned, non-microwave popcorn at home and you want it as crisp as movie-theater popcorn, top your cooking pot with a wire-mesh splatter screen instead of the pot lid. It will keep the oil from splattering and allow all the steam to escape, producing a crisp and tender treat.

—Jim Harb, Knoxville, TN

### Baking soda removes coffee and tea stains

To quickly clean coffeepots and teapots, don't use dish detergent. Just fill the pots with very hot water and baking soda, leave them in your kitchen sink for a few minutes, and then rinse with cool water. Your pots will be spar-

ling clean and untainted by detergent perfumes.

—Jean Zimkus, Woodbridge, CT

### Save refrigerator space when entertaining

When hosting a party, I put items such as cole slaw, salad, dips, etc. in zip-top bags and keep them all in a large cooler filled with ice or freezer packs. The refrigerator is then free to hold beverages, desserts, and other bulky or delicate dishes.

—Linda McLaughlin, Boston, MA

### Store capers in sherry

Drain your brine-packed capers and fill the jar with sherry instead; they'll have better flavor.

—Anne Jones, Delta, British Columbia ♦

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# Lasagna: Make 3 Freeze 2



**Assembly-line lasagne making.** Once your components are prepped, putting the three lasagne together is easy. Here, a basil-flecked egg and ricotta mixture gets topped by a tomato-meat sauce.

Instead of one huge lasagna for a crowd, make three smaller, freezable lasagne to enjoy when you want it

BY CLIFFORD A. WRIGHT

For many of us, lasagna is special-occasion food, reserved for those times when we have to feed a lot of people. But because I love a piece of lasagna more than once or twice a year (as do my kids), I make three smaller lasagne at one time, with each lasagna feeding four people amply. The amount of work involved is about the same as making one huge one. And instead of eating the leftovers of that big lasagna all week, you can eat one right away and freeze two right in their pans to enjoy down the road.

To demonstrate how well this method works, I offer a recipe for a fresh-flavored take on the classic Italian American version, as well as a robustly flavored eggplant lasagna. The traditional one is my interpretation of the lasagna my mom made, and the one I loved growing up: layers of pasta, ricotta cheese, and a tomato-y meat sauce. Even though I have since tasted and made literally a hundred different kinds of lasagna, this is the one I think of as “my lasagna.” During a recent trip to Sicily, how-





ever, I enjoyed a lasagna in Catania on Sicily's eastern shore that I was just wild about: a deeply flavored vegetable lasagna with a sauce reminiscent of the best puttanesca.

### **Sometimes three is better than one**

I think lasagna always tastes better reheated. In fact, I rarely eat it after the first baking (though it is good then). The flavors form their final melding and excess water is absorbed after the lasagna has rested

and cooled. This is why I make enough lasagne to last for several meals. To do this, and to make stacking in the freezer easier, I use three 8x8- or 9x9-inch square cakes pans—disposable are fine—that are at least 2 inches deep.

No-boil noodles taste great and are easy to work with. Because making any lasagna involves some work, I really like the ease of using instant or no-boil pasta sheets instead of the thicker, curly-edge lasagna noodles that have to be boiled before

**Classic meat lasagna shows off its many layers. Make it as tall as your ingredients will allow.**



they're layered. More important, boil-first lasagna noodles are much too thick, making for an unpleasantly chewy texture and doughy flavor. The instant lasagna sheets, by contrast, are practically translucent and seem to melt in your mouth when baked. This style of dried dough is thin enough to cook in only the liquid coming from the other ingredients



**Give the ricotta layer a flavor boost by mixing in chopped fresh basil.**



**Strive for lots of layers.** Don't worry if your tower of lasagna exceeds the height of the pan; the layers will compress as they bake.

in the lasagna. This thinness is also closer to the texture of freshly made pasta sheets—another option if you have the time or know of a good source for fresh pasta. (For more on no-boil pasta, see the sidebar at right.)

**Have ample amounts of sauce, cheese, and filling on hand for stress-free assembly.** How many times have you realized, just a little too late, that you don't have enough cheese or sauce to properly finish your lasagna, leaving you with a skimpy top layer? In these recipes, you'll have plenty of cheese, sauce, and filling to make three lasagne of at least four layers each. If you find that you have more components on hand after the four layers, you can always add another layer to one or more of the lasagne. Lasagne that are taller than the pan will settle as they bake, but you might want to put a rimmed baking sheet on the oven shelf below in case of an overflow.

While leftover sauce can be frozen and reheated to serve alongside a reheated lasagna, do be generous with it during assembly since it's the sauce, in place of boiling water, that thoroughly cooks the pasta. Ample sauce also ensures that your lasagna will be moist when you reheat it. The top sheet of pasta especially needs to be completely coated with sauce; any spots that are left bare will become brittle when baked.

A baked lasagna will last a few days in the refrigerator and for months in the freezer. For best results, defrost a frozen lasagna overnight in the refrigerator before reheating in a 400°F oven for about an hour; the time can vary depending on the number of layers and how cold the lasagna was going in. Check that the center of the lasagna is heated through by poking it with a knife or metal skewer and then feeling that the metal is hot.

## RECIPES

### Classic Meat Lasagna

Pop the mozzarella in the freezer for a few minutes before slicing; the firmer cheese will be easier to slice thinly. *Yields three lasagne of four ample servings each.*

- 2 Tbs. plus ⅓ cup olive oil**
- 2 lb. mild (sweet) Italian sausage, casing removed and broken into pieces**
- 8 cloves garlic, peeled and slightly crushed**
- 2 large onions, finely chopped**
- 1½ cups dry red wine (such as Chianti)**
- Four 28-oz. cans (or three 35-oz. cans) crushed tomatoes (about 14 cups total)**
- 2 Tbs. dried oregano**
- 2 tsp. dried thyme**
- 1 Tbs. chopped fresh rosemary (you can substitute 2 tsp. dried, but I prefer fresh)**
- 1 tsp. fennel seeds, crushed**



**1½ tsp. salt**  
**½ tsp. freshly ground black pepper**  
**1 Tbs. sugar or to taste**  
**3 large eggs**  
**1½ cups freshly grated Parmesan cheese, preferably  
 parmigiano reggiano**  
**32 oz. ricotta cheese**  
**A large handful of fresh basil leaves, washed well  
 and chopped**  
**2½ lb. fresh mozzarella cheese, sliced as thinly as  
 possible**  
**1 lb. instant (no-boil) lasagna noodles**

In a heavy-based pot, heat the 2 Tbs. olive oil over medium-high heat. Add the sausage and brown it all over, breaking it up into small pieces with a wooden spoon and stirring, 10 to 12 min. Remove the sausage with a slotted spoon and reserve. Pour off most of the fat, but leave some behind for flavor.

To the pot, add ½ cup of olive oil and the garlic and heat over medium-high heat until the garlic just begins to turn light brown, about 5 min. Remove and discard the garlic immediately, leaving the oil in the pot. Add the onions to the pot and cook, stirring frequently, until translucent, 5 to 6 min. Return the sausage to the pot. Add the red wine and cook until it has reduced by at least half, about 10 min.

Add the crushed tomatoes and stir in the oregano, thyme, rosemary, fennel seeds, salt, pepper, and sugar. Reduce the heat to medium low and cook to blend and develop the flavors, about 30 min. Taste for seasoning. You should have about 16 cups of sauce.

Meanwhile, in a large bowl, beat the eggs and add the Parmesan. Beat in the ricotta cheese. Season with salt and pepper and fold in the chopped basil.

Heat the oven to 400°F. To make three lasagne of four layers each, begin by lightly oiling three 9x9x2- or 8x8x2-inch metal or ceramic pans (disposable pans are also fine). Cover the bottom of each pan lightly with some of the sauce. Lay down a layer of pasta in each of the three pans. Spread enough of the ricotta cheese mixture on top of the pasta to cover, about ½ cup. Top the ricotta with enough sauce to cover it completely, about ½ cup. Cover with another layer of pasta and ladle more sauce over that, followed by enough mozzarella cheese to cover, enough ricotta cheese to cover, and some more sauce. Continue with two more layers in that order: pasta, sauce, mozzarella, ricotta, and sauce. Finish with a layer of pasta, some sauce, some mozzarella cheese, and a final light layer of sauce. You should be able to easily get four layers into each pan; if you have extra components, go ahead and add another layer to one or more of the lasagne. Don't worry if the height of the lasagna exceeds the pan; it settles as it bakes. Save any remaining sauce to serve with the lasagna.

Seal the pans with aluminum foil, tented so it doesn't stick to the cheese. Bake until the edges are bubbling and a knife inserted into the center of each lasagna comes out very hot, 40 to 50 minutes. Let sit 15 min. before serving or cool completely on a rack before freezing. Defrost frozen lasagna overnight in the refrigerator and then bake at 400°F for about 1 hour. *(Another recipe follows)*



## Dried or fresh, no-boil lasagna really works

Instant, or no-boil, lasagna eliminates one of the more tedious steps of making a lasagna: boiling all those unwieldy sheets of pasta. I generally use the square dried pasta sheets because they fit easily into the baking pan. (At least one pasta maker, Delverde, includes a few disposable baking pans with its sheets.) The smaller strips of instant lasagna also work well; you'll just need to overlap them slightly to fit in the pan.

Fresh pasta is another option. Some supermarkets, Italian markets, and some restaurants sell sheets of fresh pasta. If the pasta very thin, there's no need to boil it first. If you make your own pasta, use the roller to make very thin strips, which is easier than trying to roll a square by hand.



**Dried pasta sheets swell to fit the pan.** Don't worry if they look too small at first, but do trim fresh pasta close to the pan sides; it swells less.



**A teaspoon works well to spread the chunky sauce** all the way to the edges. Be sure the sheet is well coated; bare spots won't become tender.

## Sicilian Vegetable Lasagna

This Sicilian recipe from Catania, called *lasagna alla Catanese*, is typical of the baroque dishes of eastern Sicily. It's considered baroque because its flavors are luscious, fanciful, and somewhat over the top. Roasting the eggplant takes some time, especially if you have one oven, not two, but it's time largely unattended. You can also pan-fry the eggplant or grill it. *Yields three lasagne of four ample servings each.*

**6 yellow or red bell peppers**  
**¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil; more as needed**  
**1 large onion, very finely chopped**  
**6 cloves garlic, finely chopped**  
**½ cup finely chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley**  
**16 anchovy fillets (preferably salt-packed), rinsed**  
**Four 28-oz. cans tomatoes, drained, seeded and chopped (already diced is fine)**  
**¾ cup pitted and chopped imported green olives**  
**¾ cup pitted and chopped imported black olives**  
**½ cup capers, rinsed, chopped if large**  
**2 Tbs. dried oregano**  
**1 cup water**  
**Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste**  
**3 eggplant (about 1½ lb. each), peeled and sliced crosswise ¾ inch thick**  
**Olive oil for roasting the eggplant**  
**2½ lb. fresh mozzarella cheese, sliced as thinly as possible**  
**2¼ cups freshly grated Parmesan cheese, preferably *parmigiano reggiano***  
**1 lb. instant (no-boil) lasagna noodles**  
**Chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley for serving**

Char the bell peppers over a gas flame, on a grill, or under the broiler until the skins are blackened all over. Seal the peppers in

a bag or a bowl to steam for 10 min. Peel, seed, and chop the peppers.

Heat the ¼ cup of olive oil in a deep, heavy-based pot over medium-high heat. Add the onion, garlic, parsley, anchovies, and the chopped roasted bell peppers and cook, stirring frequently, until the anchovies have melted, about 10 min.

Reduce the heat to medium low and add the tomatoes, olives, capers, oregano, and water. Season with salt and pepper. Simmer, stirring occasionally, until the sauce thickens, 45 min. This will yield about 12 cups of sauce.

Heat the oven to 450°F. Line several baking sheets with parchment; lightly oil the parchment. Arrange the eggplant slices in one layer on the parchment; you may need to do this in batches. Brush the slices liberally with more olive oil and sprinkle lightly with salt. Roast until the slices are lightly browned and somewhat shrunken, 20 to 25 min.

Reduce the oven heat to 400°F. Lightly oil three 9x9x2- or 8x8x2-inch square metal or ceramic baking pans (disposable pans are also fine) and cover the bottom of each with a layer of pasta. Sprinkle some of the Parmesan over the pasta. Top with a layer of eggplant slices. Spoon some of the sauce over the eggplant to amply cover, about 1 cup. Top with a layer of mozzarella and another sprinkling of the Parmesan. Continue in this order—pasta, Parmesan, eggplant, sauce, mozzarella, Parmesan—finishing with a layer of pasta, some sauce, and the Parmesan. You should be able to easily get four layers into



**Charring, then peeling peppers gives the vegetable sauce a mellow sweetness. You can also char them under the broiler.**



**Simmering the filling ingredients together melds their potent flavors.** The result is a vegetable sauce that's as robust as any meat sauce.



**Roasting the eggplant is a flavorful, less messy alternative to frying.** The only challenge is keeping yourself from eating the toasty eggplant before you layer it in the lasagna.





**Not your usual vegetable variation.** Anchovies, olives, and capers add a briny character to this deeply flavored lasagna.

each pan; if you have extra components, you can add another layer to one or more of the lasagne.

Seal the pans with aluminum foil, tented so it doesn't stick to the cheese. Bake until a knife inserted in the center of each lasagna comes out very hot and the pasta is tender, 40 to 45 min. Let sit for 10 min. before serving or cool completely on a rack before freezing. Sprinkle the lasagna with parsley before

servicing. Defrost frozen lasagna overnight in the refrigerator and then bake at 400°F for about 1 hour.

*Clifford Wright has written many books on Italian cuisine, including one of his favorites, Lasagne (Little Brown) and A Mediterranean Feast (William Morrow), which won the James Beard award for Cookbook of the Year in 2000. ♦*

## wine choices



### Try refreshing rosés and rustic reds

The diverse flavors in the vegetable lasagna need a dry, assertive rosé. Capers, anchovies, and olives can be tricky ingredients when matching is concerned, but this is where rosés—with their fresh, berry-herbal flavors—really work their magic. Try Regaleali from Sicily, or Château d'Oupia

from France's Languedoc, both about \$9. If you prefer red wine, look for one with medium intensity, lower tannins, and little or no oak. Vietti makes a delicious Barbera for about \$16.

With the addition of sausage, the Classic Meat Lasagna demands a fuller-bodied, rustic red. Here's

where a Dolcetto from the Piedmont—with deep berry flavor, lower acidity, and substantial tannin—would be great. Ratti makes a good one (around \$10), as does Ceretto (\$19).

You'd also do well with a Cabernet Sauvignon. It may seem like an unlikely match, but Cab is loaded with

herbal aromas and flavors to echo the thyme, basil, and rosemary in the lasagna. Try the easy-drinking Bonterra from California (\$13) or Terra Rosa from Chile (around \$10).

*Robert Jones is the sommelier at the Commonwealth Club in Richmond, Virginia.*

# Slow-Sautéed Spring Vegetables

Skip the blanching and jump right to the sauté pan for sweet, earthy artichokes, carrots, beans, asparagus, and broccoli

BY LESLIE REVSIN

I love sautéed artichoke hearts, but sometimes I just don't feel like bothering with the initial par-boiling that's a prerequisite to sautéing them quickly in a very hot skillet. So one day I decided to sidestep the blanching and cook the artichokes directly, but slowly, in olive oil. It worked deliciously—the artichokes were meaty, tender, and succulent. When I tried the technique with asparagus, string beans, and broccoli, I came up with a bunch of great side dishes, as well as ideas for using these vegetables in other dishes, such as risotto, salads, and pasta.

I call these creatures slow-sautéed vegetables, and they are, to me, the wise old souls of the vegetable kitchen. I love the way they develop deep, earthy richness and how their natural sweetness emerges during their unhurried cooking. Most of all, I love their utter simplicity. Using this method (it's more method than recipe), there's no preliminary blanching, draining, or ice-water shocking. Here, the vegetables go straight into the pan, usually in the company of good, fruity olive oil, and are cooked leisurely over low heat to the point of browned, comforting tenderness. They can pretty much cook on their own as you proceed with other tasks in the kitchen.

The best vegetables to choose are those with a relatively low water content because they won't lose

their shape and get mushy when cooked at a low temperature. Broccoli, cauliflower, string beans, artichoke bottoms, carrots, turnips, asparagus, and cabbage are good choices.

My favorite pans for this technique are the stalwarts of my kitchen—my cast-iron skillets. But any heavy-based pan that's a good heat conductor will do the job, such as thick stainless steel, lined copper, or any pan with a sandwiched aluminum core. Avoid lightweight aluminum or thin stainless-steel pans if possible because they'll cook the vegetables unevenly and probably burn them. I don't use non-stick pans because I don't think they allow the flavors to develop as fully, and when I want to deglaze the pan with a spritz of water to incorporate the brown bits stuck to the bottom, there are none to be had. Whatever pan you use, it has to be large enough—9 or 10 inches in diameter—to hold vegetables for four servings.

## A little steam helps slow browning

This slow sauté method is quite simple. To start, I heat some olive oil (or perhaps a dot of butter) in a skillet, though sometimes I toss the vegetables with olive oil and then add them to a heated dry pan. I cook the vegetables on low or medium low, listening for a sizzle to help clue me in to how quickly they're browning. You definitely want some caramelization, but not too much and not too soon, or the vegetables will burn before they're completely tender.

Essentially, all I'm doing is watching, listening, stirring occasionally, and adjusting the heat up or down whenever it seems necessary to control the browning. When the vegetables are fully tender and nicely colored, which takes about 20 minutes for asparagus to 40 minutes for broccoli, they're done. Depending on the quantity of the vegetable and how it's cut, the size and type of skillet, and the burner, cooking times will vary quite a bit, which is why the times given in the recipes that follow give such a wide range.

With classic high-heat sautés, you generally want to avoid crowding the pan so the vegetables don't





**To bring out the sweet and tender side of asparagus,** Leslie Revsin pares its slightly fibrous skin.



**Slow sautés need gentle heat, an occasional toss, and time.** The unhurried cooking yields vegetables with concentrated sweetness.



**Asparagus with pancetta makes an easy side dish, or the beginning of an entrée.**



## Cutting vegetables for slow sautés

The size and cut of the vegetable is important so the pieces cook at about the same rate and brown fairly evenly. Cut broccoli and cauliflower into 1½-inch florets, leaving just enough stem to hold them together. Cut carrots thickly on the bias, which gives them more surface area for better heat penetration and browning. I peel asparagus spears to remove the slightly fibrous skin. I also think they taste sweeter this way. Slice green or red cabbage into ½-inch strips.

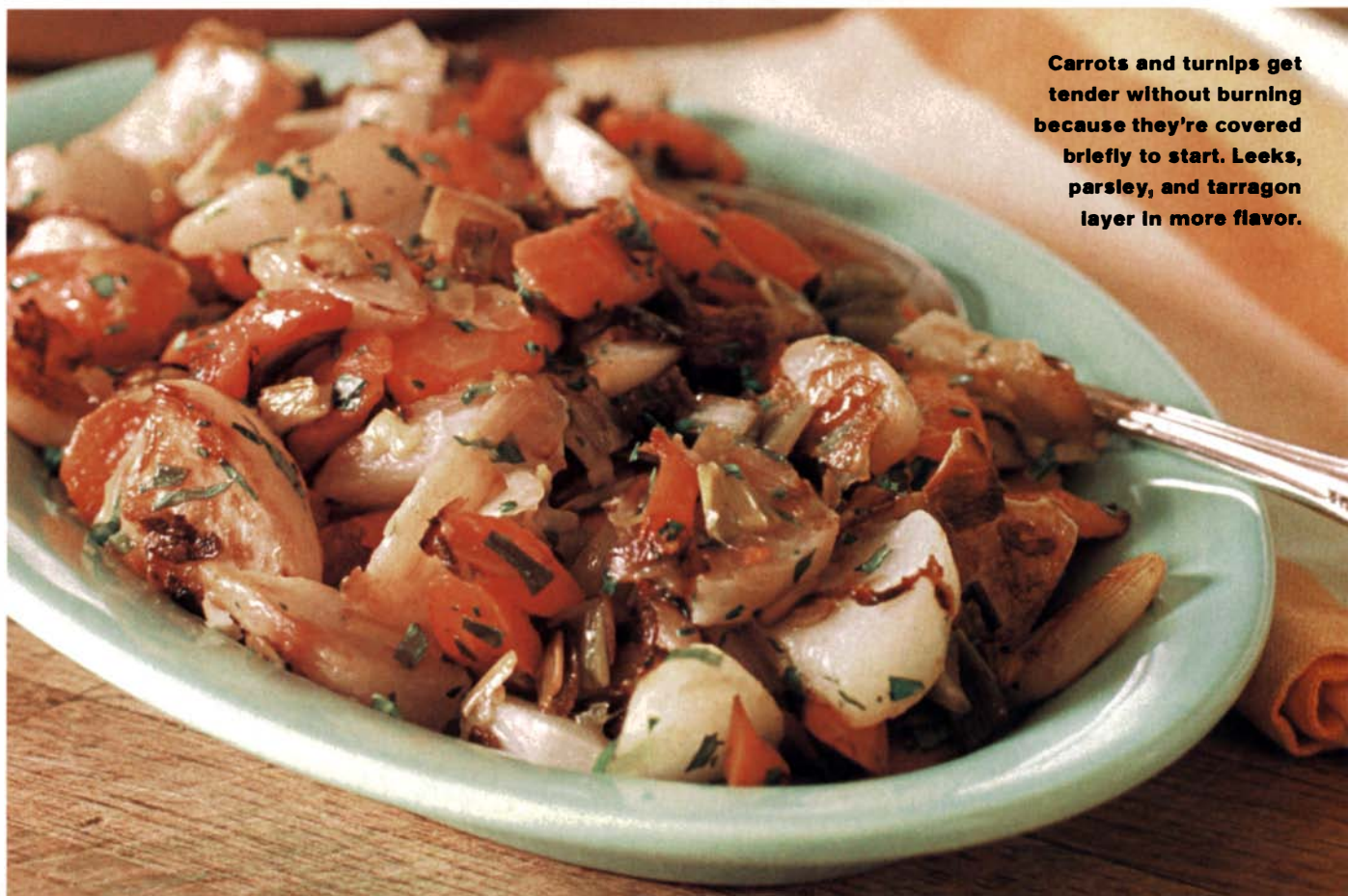
String beans are easiest of all; they're cooked intact after their ends are snapped off. Some beans are bound to be younger and slimmer, others more mature and thick. As a result, the finished dish consists of lots of wrinkled, browned, almost collapsed string beans highlighted by some slightly crisp, thicker ones that refused to let go. For me, this textural variety adds to the character of the dish.

steam as they give off moisture. But with these slow sautés, a touch of steam isn't such a bad thing. You're using vegetables with less water, and the little moisture they give off helps them cook faster and also slows browning. There are two ways that I let the steam work for me: by layering the vegetables or by covering the pan.

I cook **broccoli, cauliflower, and asparagus in layers**. By cooking the vegetables close together, one and a half or two layers deep, the steam they produce helps to control browning. Eventually, as they lose more moisture and volume, their flavor will intensify and you'll get more caramelization.

**Denser vegetables like artichoke bottoms, turnips, and carrots do well if covered briefly.** This gives them a jump-start of steam before they're uncovered and cooked until tender and brown. Don't cover any vegetable for more than one third or one half of its total cooking time or you'll lose out on flavor. They'll taste more steamed than slow-sautéed.

The rich flavor of these vegetables stands on its own, but I usually add a finishing flourish or two, such as Parmesan, lemon, or herbs, as a dress-up accent. And while these vegetables loudly declare, "I'm an excellent side dish," don't relegate them to that role alone. See how some can strut their stuff as appetizers; as a garnish or stir-in for cooked rice, grains, and pasta; as a bed for fish fillets, chops, cutlets, and poultry; or as an unexpected touch for a bowl of soup or plate of stew.



**Carrots and turnips get tender without burning because they're covered briefly to start. Leeks, parsley, and tarragon layer in more flavor.**



### Slow-Sautéed Carrots & Turnips

In this slow sauté, the vegetables get a jump-start over high heat and are covered briefly to give a short-lived shot of steam to the carrots and turnips. Turnips cook faster than carrots, so I cut them slightly larger to compensate. *Serves four.*

- 1½ Tbs. olive oil, preferably fruity and full flavored**
- 1½ Tbs. unsalted butter**
- 3 leeks, white and pale green part only, halved lengthwise if large, cut into ½-inch rings, separated, well washed, and well drained (to yield 2 cups)**
- 2 medium turnips (1 lb. total), peeled and cut into ½-inch wedges (to yield 2¾ cups)**
- 5 to 6 carrots (¾ lb. total), peeled and sliced on the bias ¾ inch thick (to yield 2 cups)**
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper**
- 1 Tbs. coarsely chopped fresh tarragon or basil**
- 2 tsp. chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley**

Set a heavy 9- to 10-inch skillet over high heat with the olive oil and butter. When the butter has melted, stir in the leeks, turnips, and carrots, and cook for 1 min., stirring once or twice. Season with salt, cover, reduce the heat to medium low, and cook for 5 min. Uncover and cook at a medium sizzle, stirring occasionally, until the carrots and turnips are almost completely tender and are nicely—but lightly—browned, about 25 min. (After about 15 min., the vegetables should be just starting to brown, so lower the heat if they're cooking too quickly.)

Reduce the heat to very low and continue cooking until tender, about 5 min. more. Turn off the heat, season to taste with pepper and more salt, if necessary. Gently fold in the tarragon or basil. Transfer to a warm serving dish, sprinkle with the parsley (or fold it in as well), and serve.

### Slow-Sautéed Asparagus with Pancetta

Pancetta is like bacon except that instead of being a smoked, sliced slab, it's cured in salt and rolled into a thick sausage shape. It's available in many grocery stores now, as well as gourmet and Italian markets. For a vegetarian version, you can eliminate it. *Serves four.*

- 1½ oz. pancetta, sliced ⅛ inch thick, cut into ¼x¾-inch strips (to yield ¼ cup)**
- 1 Tbs. olive oil, preferably fruity and full flavored**
- 2 small cloves garlic, very thinly sliced**
- 2 to 3 tsp. unsalted butter**
- 1¾ lb. medium to large asparagus (28 to 32 spears), fibrous ends snapped off, stems peeled, rinsed, and drained**
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper**
- Lemon wedges for serving**

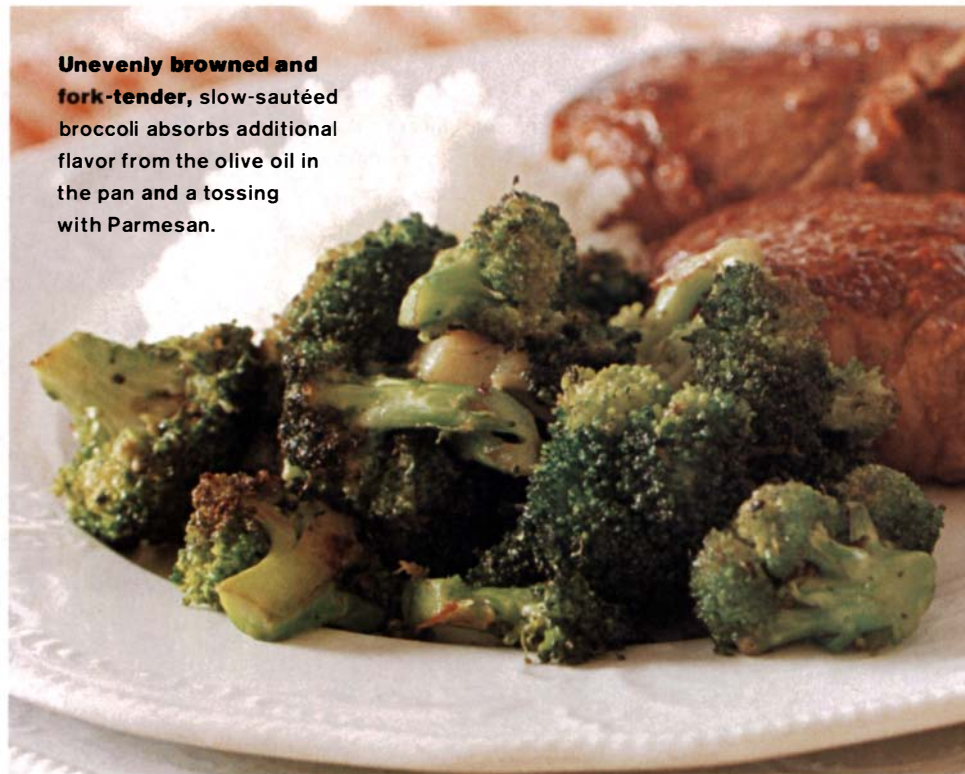
Set a plate lined with paper towels near the stovetop. Set a heavy 10-inch skillet over medium heat with the pancetta and olive oil. Cook the pancetta, stirring frequently, until light brown and slightly crisp (don't let it fully crisp and harden), about 10 min. Remove from the heat and transfer the pancetta with a slotted

spoon to drain on the prepared plate (leave the fat in the pan).

Set the skillet back over medium heat and cook the garlic, stirring continually, 30 seconds or until just starting to turn light gold. Transfer the garlic with the slotted spoon to drain with the pancetta.

If less than 1 Tbs. fat remains in the pan, add enough olive oil to compensate. Melt the butter in the pan, add the asparagus, and season with salt and pepper. Sauté, stirring frequently, until the spears are light golden brown and tender (they won't brown evenly) with a slight edge of crispness, 20 to 30 min.

Transfer the spears to a serving platter, scatter the reserved pancetta and garlic over them, and serve with the lemon wedges.



**Unevenly browned and fork-tender, slow-sautéed broccoli absorbs additional flavor from the olive oil in the pan and a tossing with Parmesan.**

### Slow-Sautéed Broccoli with Parmesan

Coaxing the ultimate flavor from broccoli requires very little: a big, fresh, bright bunch of the same, some fruity olive oil, a few spoonfuls of grated Parmesan, and a leisurely bit of time on the range. You could also use cauliflower or a combination of the two. *Serves four.*

- 6 Tbs. olive oil, preferably fruity and full flavored**
- 1½ large heads of broccoli (1¾ lb. total), cut into 1½- to 2-inch florets to yield 6½ cups (discard the thicker parts of the stems or save for another use)**
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper**
- 3 Tbs. freshly grated Parmesan, preferably *parmigiano reggiano***

Set a heavy 9- to 10-inch skillet over medium heat with the olive oil. When the oil is hot, add the broccoli and sauté, stirring frequently, until it turns bright

# Getting to the bottom of an artichoke



Trim the stem flush with the bottom. Snap back the leaves one at a time—they'll break about a quarter of the way from the base. About two-thirds of the way in, the leaves become yellowish and form a cone shape with an indentation around their base.



Slice through the indentation with a sharp knife and remove the top. You can now see the sharp, purple-tipped leaves that cover the silky, hairy choke, which hides the bottom.



Scrape out and discard the leaves and fibers until the bottom is clean and smooth, being careful not to gouge the flesh. Moisten the scraped inside with a lemon half to prevent browning.



With a sharp paring knife, trim off the fibrous dark green layer around and under the bottom to reveal a tender yellow and pale green layer. Rub the outside with lemon.



**Lemon juice and thyme brightly complement the deep earthiness of artichoke hearts.**

green, about 2 min. Season with salt and pepper and reduce the heat to low so you hear a steady low to medium sizzle.

Cook the broccoli, stirring occasionally, for about 20 min., lowering the heat at any point if it gets too brown (a crackling sound indicates the heat is too high and that the broccoli may start to burn). Reduce the heat to very low and continue cooking until the broccoli is unevenly browned and tender but not mushy, another 15 to 20 min. Transfer the broccoli to a warm serving bowl, toss with the grated cheese, taste for salt and pepper, and serve.

## Slow-Sautéed Artichokes with Lemon Juice & Thyme

For me, an artichoke is one of the world's luxurious eating experiences, particularly when I can savor it in big meaty pieces. Serve these hot as a side dish or garnish for meat, chicken, or fish, as a room-temperature hors d'oeuvre, or chilled as a special touch in a tossed green salad. *Serves four.*

**4 large globe artichokes, prepared as shown in the photos above**

**3 Tbs. olive oil, preferably fruity and full flavored**  
**Salt and freshly ground black pepper**

**1½ to 2 Tbs. fresh lemon juice, plus 2 lemon halves to prepare the artichokes**

**1½ tsp. very lightly chopped fresh thyme leaves**

Cut the artichoke bottoms in quarters (or halves, if small) and put them in a large bowl. Drizzle all over with the olive oil and season with salt and pepper. Set a heavy 8-inch skillet over low heat, and when hot, add the artichokes (they should just cover the bottom of the skillet), scraping out all the oil from the bowl into the skillet with a rubber spatula. Cover the skillet and cook, stirring once or twice, until they're a little less than halfway done, 10 to 15 min.

Remove the cover and continue cooking at a low sizzle, turning occasionally, until they're lightly browned and tender-firm (I use a wooden skewer to check), another 8 to 15 min. Add the lemon juice and thyme and toss together until the pan juices have thickened to coat the artichokes nicely. Taste and season with more salt and pepper and olive oil, if you like.

## Slow-Sautéed String Beans with Shallots & Ham

The beans won't all cook at the same rate. If you want them to, you can cut the recipe in half and cook them



in a single layer. *Herbes de Provence* is a blend of dried herbs, such as thyme, rosemary, marjoram, and sage; most supermarkets carry it in the spice section. Adding the herbs in the beginning lets their flavor penetrate and season both the oil and the green beans. *Serves four.*

- 4 Tbs. olive oil, preferably fruity and full-flavored**
- 1 lb. string beans, trimmed, rinsed, and drained well**
- 6 medium shallots (½ lb. total), peeled and halved to make pieces about 1 inch thick at the widest part (to yield 1 generous cup)**
- ¾ tsp. dried *herbes de Provence***
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper**
- 1½ oz. smoked ham, such as Black Forest, cut into ¼x1-inch strips (optional)**

Set a heavy 9- to 10-inch skillet over medium-low heat with the oil. When the oil is hot, add the beans and shallots (the mixture will fit in the pan in two or three layers) and season with the *herbes de Provence*, salt, and pepper. Cook at a good, strong sizzle, uncovered, stirring occasionally and lowering the heat if necessary, until most of the beans and some of the shallots are well browned and falling apart, 30 to 40 min.

Continue cooking for about another 5 min., stirring frequently, until the beans are tender. Stir in the ham, if using, and 1 Tbs. water to deglaze any browned bits stuck on the bottom of the skillet. Heat through as the water evaporates, about 30 seconds. Taste for salt and pepper and serve.

*Leslie Revsin, a chef who has worked in several New York restaurants, is working on her second book. ♦*



**Contrasting textures add interest to string beans and shallots.** Thinner beans cook to a wrinkled, browned sweetness, while more mature ones offer a refreshing crispness.

## Slow-sautéed vegetables as a springboard for other dishes

### **Carrots & Turnips with Tarragon**

- ♦ Stir into a hot broth for a quick, satisfying soup, or purée for a heartier consistency.
- ♦ Use as a bed for thinly sliced roast beef, pot roast, or roast pork.
- ♦ Toss with a light tomato sauce and basil for a light vegetarian dinner.
- ♦ Mash the leftovers, shape into patties, and fry in a non-stick pan for vegetable cakes.

### **Broccoli with Parmesan**

- ♦ Toss with pasta and a little more olive oil, or with garlic and cream or broth, or smoked chicken.

- ♦ Fold into rice pilaf at the end of cooking.
- ♦ Use as a topping for soft polenta.
- ♦ Make a vegetable sandwich with mozzarella, roasted peppers, and basil.
- ♦ Toss with sturdy salad greens when room temperature or chilled.

### **Asparagus with Pancetta & Garlic**

- ♦ Top a classic risotto or cut spears into shorter lengths and stir into risotto.
- ♦ Top a plate of mesclun dressed with vinaigrette.
- ♦ Cut the asparagus shorter and toss with pasta and more olive oil, broth, or cream.

- ♦ Eliminate the pancetta and serve the asparagus wrapped in slices of prosciutto.

### **Artichokes with Lemon & Thyme**

- ♦ Toss with roasted red peppers and serve over slivered endive dressed in balsamic or sherry vinaigrette.
- ♦ Cut into eighths and toss warm with cooked rice or grains or fold into seafood risotto.
- ♦ Mix with cooked string beans and cannellini beans for a more elaborate side dish.

### **String Beans with Shallots**

- ♦ Mix into eggs for a frittata.

- ♦ Toss leftovers in a pan with olive oil, cooked rice, capers, and garlic.
- ♦ Make a quick gratin with a top layer of grated mozzarella cheese and run it under the broiler to melt.







# Cooking Fish “à la Meunière”

The classic French preparation for fish known as “à la meunière” rings of simplicity. The name translates as “in the style of the miller’s wife,” which frankly doesn’t mean a whole lot to the modern cook, but it refers to the fact that the fish is dusted with flour before cooking. I suppose it could equally well be called “in the style of the dairy wife” (though I’m not sure how to translate that one), because the fish is sautéed in clarified butter until it’s crisped and golden, and then it’s finished with a bit of brown butter, as well as lemon and parsley.

The simplicity of sole meunière is illustrated by the list of ingredients. They are six: the fish (which doesn’t have to be sole—other white-fleshed fish work beautifully, as do scallops and even frogs’

There’s a good reason this method is a classic: it’s quick, easy, and perfectly suited to the mild flavor of sole or halibut

BY RANDALL PRICE

legs), milk, flour, butter, lemon, and parsley. With so few elements in a dish, it’s critical that each is of the best possible quality. We can take for granted that the milk, flour, parsley, and lemon are acceptable (as long as you’re using a real lemon, not ReaLemon), but the remaining players in the recipe need some attention, as does the way you set up your work station before you start to cook.

**Whole sole are traditional, but fillets are easier**

In France, this dish is made using a whole sole, usually weighing about a half-pound. Left whole, the fish doesn’t break up during the cooking, and leaving the flesh on the bones adds to the flavor. In most parts of the United States, however,



## How to make clarified butter

Heat ½ pound (two sticks) of unsalted butter in a small, heavy saucepan over low heat. As the butter slowly melts, it will separate into a small amount of milky liquid at the bottom of the pan, a large quantity of clear liquid, and a bit of foamy white residue floating on the top. All you want is the clear liquid, which is the clarified butter. Spoon off the residue from the top and discard it. Without disturbing the white liquid (the milk

solids) on the bottom, spoon or pour the clear liquid into another container.

If you have time, you can refrigerate the melted butter until the clarified part is solid. The milk solids, contrary to their name, will remain liquid. Pry the solid clarified butter off and pour away the milky part.



it's difficult to find a whole sole or other flatfish that's small enough, so I just use fillets. What you lose in impact, you gain in ease of preparation.

Look for firm fillets that seem moist but aren't weeping liquid (a sign of having been poorly frozen). If possible, give them a sniff—you want pleasant ocean smell, not "fishy" odor.

### Clarified butter can take the heat, while brown butter adds nuttiness

To achieve its characteristic flavor, fish meunière must cook in butter, and since milk solids tend to burn at the temperatures required for sautéing, the butter must be clarified. Don't worry—this isn't a complicated process (see the sidebar



**Milk and flour produce a light, crisp coating that browns nicely in the clarified butter.**

above), and you can clarify a quantity of butter ahead of time and keep it in the refrigerator for many other cooking uses. Use a good-quality unsalted butter, but certainly not the most expensive.

### "Ready, set, cook" is right

Sole meunière must be prepared at the last moment, and the actual cooking of the dish is quite fast. It's easy to enjoy this last-minute dish as long as you've done some advance preparation. I like to work backward, from serving through cooking: Get your serving plates ready, ideally in a warm spot. Have your chopped parsley and lemon juice easy to grab. Have your whole melted butter in a small pan on the stove, ready to be browned. Arrange your milk, flour, and paper towels so you can do a quick lift-blot-dredge-and-sauté. This small organizational effort will pay off when you present your fish, fragrant with brown butter and foaming with parsley and lemon juice, to the table.



**Two tools help the turn.** The fillets are delicate, so ease them over gently with a spatula and a large spoon.

## Classic Sole Meunière

Fillets of turbot or halibut are good alternatives to sole. I don't recommend flounder or cod fillets; they're too delicate. *Serves four.*

- 1½ lb. firm, white-fleshed sole fillets (or 4 ½-lb. whole sole, skinned and gutted)**
- 1 cup milk**
- ¾ cup all-purpose flour, seasoned with ½ tsp. salt and ¼ tsp. freshly ground black pepper**
- ½ cup clarified butter (see method at left)**
- 6 Tbs. melted unsalted butter (not clarified)**
- 4 Tbs. fresh lemon juice**
- 4 Tbs. finely chopped fresh parsley**

Arrange the fillets in a shallow dish and pour the milk over them. Let soak for at least 5 min. and up to 20 min. Set up your work area so that you can move quickly: position your serving plates or platter, the milk soaking pan, a pile of paper towels, and the seasoned flour on a plate. Have the melted butter in a small, heavy-based saucepan, and the lemon juice and parsley ready for action.

In one or two large frying pans, heat the clarified butter over medium-high heat until very hot but not quite smoking. Lift a fillet from the milk, blot it on the paper towels, dip it into the flour, and shake off the excess. Carefully lay the fish in the hot fat. Repeat with the other fillets, but don't overcrowd the pan or you'll have trouble flipping. Adjust the temperature to keep the fat sizzling briskly but not burning. Cook the fish until golden on one side, about 2 min. With a slotted spatula, a large spoon, and great care, gently flip the fish.

When the second side of the fish is golden brown and the flesh is tender when poked with a sharp knife in the thickest part, use the slotted spatula to remove the sole, set it on paper towels to drain briefly, and arrange on the warm platter or plates.

When all the fillets are cooked, heat the melted whole butter carefully over medium-high heat, swirling the pan occasionally, until the butter is fragrant and the milk solids turn nutty brown; remove the pan from the heat so the butter doesn't keep cooking, but keep it hot.

Working fast, pour 1 Tbs. of the lemon juice evenly over each fish and sprinkle on the parsley. Pour about 1½ Tbs. of the hot browned butter on each fish—if all has gone well, you'll see and hear a delicious sizzle. (If there's no sizzle, it will still taste great.) Serve immediately.

*Randall Price is a private chef and cooking teacher who divides his time between Paris, Burgundy, and the Auvergne. ♦*

# One Golden Broth,



**Portuguese rice soup gets a bright, herby boost from lemon and mint.**



Photo: Sarah Jay



**The ultimate in soothing soups, chicken noodle works magic with its rich, full-flavored broth.**



**So light they'll float.** Matzo balls and chicken broth make a simple, sustaining meal.



# Three Chicken Soups

Get the deep flavor you want by reducing the broth and then add noodles, rice, or matzo balls for comfort and nourishment

BY JOYCE GOLDSTEIN



Remember the best-selling book *Chicken Soup for the Soul*, an anthology of inspirational stories to help people feel better about themselves? No one questioned the culinary metaphor in the title. It takes no stretch of the imagination. In nearly every culture, chicken soup is soul food, providing comfort to all who drink in its hot and healing properties. Whether it's a simple broth or enhanced with noodles, rice, or matzo balls, it makes you feel nourished and comforted.

When a friend heard that I was asked to write about chicken soup, she smiled and said, "Of course, you're a Jewish grandmother." True, chicken soups are an essential part of my culinary repertoire. I've been making them for so long that it's almost a reflex. My soups are clear, intensely flavored, and wonderfully sustaining. I get such great results not because I'm a Jewish grandmother, but because I pay attention to a few details that really count—starting with the right chicken, substantially reducing the broth after it has been strained, and knowing how to cook, but not overcook, vegetables, noodles, and rice.

From my huge international repertoire of chicken soups, I've chosen three of the simplest and most comforting for this article: classic chicken noodle soup, Portuguese soup with lemon and mint, and matzo ball soup. They're family favorites, and many of my customers at Square One restaurant loved them as well.

## **Best chicken for soup: an old hen or a kosher broiler**

When I was growing up in Brooklyn, chicken soup always began with a walk to the kosher poultry store. We would select a fine live pullet (a young hen that hasn't yet begun laying eggs), have it killed, cleaned, and cut up on the spot, and then carry it home to make soup. Alas, finding a bird of that quality has become almost impossible. Even chickens labeled "free range" don't have the flavor of those kosher pullets. And big roasters, although

they're the right size, are too fatty and don't give off enough flavor.

**So what do I use to make chicken soup today?** If I can find an older hen or rooster at my market, I buy it. Otherwise, I get two large broilers, which are younger, smaller chickens that weigh about 3½ or 4 pounds. I might ask the butcher to cut up the birds and maybe throw in a few extra necks and backs for a richer broth.

I like to use kosher chickens because they're salted during the processing and therefore have more flavor. Empire is one brand that I like. If I'm not using a kosher chicken, I clean it and then rub the whole bird or parts with a cut lemon and sprinkle it lightly with coarse salt to boost its flavor. I wrap the salted chicken in plastic and refrigerate it overnight, or even for just a few hours (there's no need to rinse off the salt before cooking). This step isn't essential by any means, but it does bring out more flavor and make the broth taste more chickeny.

### **For great broth: simmer to extract flavor, strain, and reduce by half**

Before I explain how to make the soup, let me clarify a few cooking terms. *Chicken soup* is the finished product with all the garnishes and components. It contains *chicken broth*, chicken, vegetables, and often a starchy addition like noodles, rice, or dumplings. Broth is similar to stock, except it has deeper flavor. Broth can be a soup in its own right (think of consommé), while *chicken stock* is a base for other dishes, a foundation for a sauce, or a starting point for other soups. There are times when broth and stock are interchangeable, but for chicken soup, you definitely want the fuller flavor of broth.

**To make a basic chicken broth**, you simmer fresh chicken, carrots, onions, celery, and a few aromatics, such as parsley, thyme, and peppercorns. A few cloves of garlic and bay leaf might also be added. Some cooks include a parsnip for sweetness, others a piece of celery root or parsley root. Chinese cooks add ginger slices. Some families stick a few cloves into the onion. If I plan to take the broth in a particular ethnic direction, I might add two strips of lemon or lime zest, a few dried red chiles, or a smashed stalk of lemongrass.

Note that I haven't mentioned salt. Because the liquid reduces substantially,



**You'll need two large broilers for the broth. If you want, carve out the breast meat to cook later and add to the soup.**

any salt added at the start would become concentrated, and you might end up with an oversalted broth. To avoid this, add this critical seasoning at the end.

**Measurements needn't be exact.** My basic recipe suggests six pounds of chicken parts. If you're a little over, just bump up the vegetables a bit. The important thing is that everything in the pot is initially covered by about two inches of cold water. As the broth simmers uncovered, that gives you a good margin for evaporation.

For a clear broth, it's important to skim off scum as the liquid comes to a boil, and

then reduce the heat to a simmer. I continue to skim as necessary during the first half hour of simmering.

After three hours of simmering, pretty much all the flavor has been extracted from the chicken and vegetables. The chicken meat is dry and usually tasteless—its flavor has gone into the broth, which was the whole idea—so I strain it out and discard it, along with the carcass and vegetables.



**For clarity, skim early and often. To catch all the scum and impurities, use a fine-mesh skimmer or ladle the broth through a mesh tea strainer.**

At this point, I cool the broth. Do this quickly (an ice bath works well) and uncovered to avoid the chance of fermentation. Then I cover it, refrigerate, and wait for the fat to congeal on top for easy removal. Before the cholesterol-conscious era, chicken soup was judged by the quantity of golden fat droplets that floated alluringly on its surface. I have mixed feelings about this loss of color and rich-

## **Great chicken soup arises from clear, full-flavored broth (not stock), achieved by frequent skimming and lots of reducing.**

ness, but I dutifully comply with current health dictums and scoop the fat away.

**With the fat gone, you're left with a light broth.** The most efficient way to intensify it is to boil it to reduce its volume by half, or until the flavor hits the level you want. Or, if you would rather not evaporate away half the liquid, you can make what I call a double chicken broth: Make a second batch of broth using the first batch (not water) as the





**Straining the broth shouldn't be a strain.** Instead of hoisting a hot, heavy stockpot over a sieve, it's a lot easier—and safer—to use a large ladle or small saucepan.



**Skim the fat, save the broth.** Chilling produces a hard cap of fat, which is easy to scrape off.



**The final step for a rich, golden broth.** Reducing the broth by boiling deepens its color and chickeny flavor.

cooking medium. You'll need another fresh chicken to do this.

**A do-ahead tip: cook noodles or rice separately for more control**

Now that you've got an intense, delicious broth, you can serve it as a simple nourishing soup or dress it up. There are no real rules here. You could add noodles, tortellini, ravioli, filled wontons, dumplings, rice, bread, vegetables, chicken pieces, grated cheese, poached eggs, beaten eggs, egg and lemon, parsley, mint, cilantro...whatever sounds good to you.

As a chef in a busy restaurant, I learned that one way to control the quality of a dish was by cooking all the components separately and then combining at the last minute. This isn't how I normally cook at home, but when I'm adding garnishes to soup, I use this technique to ensure perfect doneness of each element. It also lets me do absolutely everything ahead of time. It doesn't take much extra effort to cook rice, noodles, carrots, or

chicken pieces individually, and I think it makes all the difference.

If you'd rather cook everything in the broth all at once, you can, but pay attention to the timing and order in which they're added to avoid overcooking.

**To add chicken pieces, poach fresh boneless breast meat in the reduced broth.** You don't need to buy extra boneless breasts to do this. You can just cut the breast meat off the whole bird or chicken parts you plan to use for the broth, reserving it for later. Whether you poach the breast whole or cut it into pieces before cooking doesn't matter, but either way, you want to avoid poaching for too long and ending up with overly soft, weak-flavored chicken.

**Egg noodles are my preference for chicken noodle soup.** They're tender and have a nice toothsome quality. In a pinch, I might use pastina or other small pasta. To avoid soggy noodles, cook them in boiling salted water and drain them the minute they're *al dente*. They continue

cooking a bit even after being drained, and again once they're added to the broth, so err on the side of undercooking.

**If it's a rice soup, I lean toward basmati.** It holds its shape better than most other long-grain varieties, and it has a lovely, delicate fragrance. As with pasta, I cook the rice separately until it's still got some bite left.

One last point: only add noodles and rice to the broth you plan on serving at that meal. These starches continue absorbing liquid, which means that after sev-

eral hours, they'll be waterlogged, and you'll end up with hardly any broth.

**Matzo ball soup: a Passover tradition and cold-weather winner**

Matzo ball soup is an essential and much-loved part of the Passover seder meal, and it's also a heartwarming soup for the chilly days of fall and winter. A matzo ball, if you've not tried one, is a dumpling made of ground matzo, eggs, fat, and seasonings. Packaged ground matzo is called matzo meal, and it's usually available year-round in supermarkets.

**The rich flavor comes from chicken fat.** Rendered chicken fat is traditional, but you can substitute with the fat that you've scooped off the refrigerated broth. If you want to use rendered fat, ask your butcher; he may have some in reserve.

**For matzo balls that float, don't overmix.** As with muffin batter, you want to fold in the dry ingredients until just combined. Form the balls gently with your hands without compacting them. Also crucial is the cooking time. The longer you poach the matzo balls in boiling water, the lighter they'll be.



**Joyce Goldstein uses a light touch when forming matzo balls. The batter, made of matzo meal, eggs, and fat, needs little more than a few quick stirs to combine.**

RECIPES

**Golden Chicken Broth**

For the *bouquet garni*, I stuff the herbs and peppercorns in a mesh tea ball. The broth keeps in the fridge for 3 days, at which point it must be simmered for 10 min. to prevent bacterial growth before it can be held for another 3 days, simmered for 10 min., ad infinitum. Frozen, it keeps for at least 3 months. *Yields about 2 qt. reduced broth.*

**About 6 lb. chicken parts (1 large older bird or 2 cut-up broilers), excess fat removed, plus extra necks and backs, if possible**

**2 medium onions, halved**

**2 to 3 carrots, peeled and coarsely chopped**

**1 large or 2 small ribs celery, including small, crisp leaves, chopped**

**1 leek, top and root trimmed, halved lengthwise, chopped in large pieces, and rinsed well (optional)**

***Bouquet garni* of 2 to 3 sprigs fresh thyme, 6 sprigs fresh parsley, and 6 to 8 peppercorns, bruised; add 1 small bay leaf and 2 cloves garlic, if you like**  
**Salt to taste**

Cut the breast meat from the chicken and refrigerate; you'll cook it in the broth later (if you're making matzo ball soup without chicken pieces, save the breast meat for another use). Put the rest of the chicken and parts in a large stockpot (at least 10 qt.) and add cold water to cover by 2 inches, at least 5½ qt. Bring to a boil and then lower the heat to a simmer. Skim the scum from the surface and simmer gently for 30 min., skimming as necessary. Add the onions, carrots, celery, leek (if using), and *bouquet garni* and continue to simmer for another 2 to 3 hours.

With a slotted spoon or Chinese skimmer, remove and discard the solids. Set a fine-mesh sieve or a strainer lined with wet cheesecloth over a pot or bowl big enough to hold the broth (you'll have about 4 qt.). Strain the broth through the sieve, and chill it uncovered in an ice bath or the fridge. When it's cool, cover and refrigerate until the fat congeals on the surface. Scrape off the fat with a spoon or spatula. (Reserve ¼ cup fat for matzo balls, if necessary; otherwise, discard the fat.)

To intensify the broth's flavor, bring it to a low boil and reduce, skimming if neces-

sary, until it's as rich and chickeny as you like; it may need to reduce by half. (Since the broth hasn't been seasoned yet, you might want to add salt to the sample that you're tasting for flavor.)

Chill the broth as before, waiting until it cools before covering it. Before serving, simmer for at least 10 min. and season to taste with salt.

**Matzo Ball Soup**

The matzo balls can be cooked ahead and then warmed in the broth before serving. To turn this into a more filling meal, you could add cooked chicken, peas, or carrots. But for the classic, less is more. The recipe doubles or triples easily. To render chicken fat, use fat taken from the cavity of a chicken (roasters have a lot), cut into 1-inch pieces, melt over low heat, and then strain. *Serves six.*

**4 large eggs**

**½ cup cold water**

**¼ cup rendered chicken fat or fat reserved from the broth recipe at left, at room temperature**

**1 tsp. coarse salt**



**¼ tsp. ground white pepper**  
**5 oz. (1¼ cups) matzo meal**  
**7 cups Golden Chicken Broth (recipe opposite)**  
**¼ cup chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley**

In a large bowl, whisk together the eggs and cold water. Add the rendered or reserved chicken fat and whisk until the fat blends in. Mix in the salt and pepper. Gradually but quickly stir in the matzo meal with a spoon; the mixture will be thick and stiff, like muffin batter. Don't overmix. Chill for at least 1 hour or up to 3 hours.

Line a baking sheet with parchment or waxed paper and fill a bowl with cold water. Dip a large soup spoon in the water, and gently scoop up the chilled matzo mixture and shape it with your hands into 12 medium balls (about 1¾ inches in diameter) or 18 smaller ones (about 1¼ inches in diameter), being careful not to compact them. Put the matzo balls on



**The longer matzo balls cook, the lighter they'll be. This poaching step can be done several hours before serving.**

the lined baking sheet. Cook immediately or refrigerate for up to 1 hour.

To cook the matzo balls, bring 1 or 2 large pots of salted water to a boil. Drop in the matzo balls, cover the pots, and reduce the heat after the water returns to a boil. Simmer, covered, until the matzo balls have doubled in size and have lightened all the way through (cut one in half to check), 30 to 40 min.; drain. They can be held at room temperature for several hours.

To serve, bring the chicken broth to a boil. Taste for salt and pepper. Add the matzo balls and heat until they're hot in

the middle, 8 to 10 min. With a slotted spoon, put 2 medium or 3 small matzo balls in a warm soup bowl. Ladle in hot broth and sprinkle generously with the parsley. Serve right away.

### **Chicken Noodle Soup with Carrots & Peas**

Even during their very brief season, I find that English garden peas can be starchy, so here I suggest using frozen peas, which are consistently sweet and tender. You can thaw them ahead or else defrost them right in the hot broth. *Serves four.*

**7 cups Golden Chicken Broth (recipe opposite)**  
**2 boneless, skinless whole chicken breasts, cut into 1x½-inch strips or ½-inch dice**  
**1½ cups diced or julienned carrots**  
**3 oz. (about 1½ cups) dried egg noodles**  
**1½ cups frozen peas**  
**2 Tbs. chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley**  
**1 tsp. chopped fresh thyme**  
**Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste**  
**Freshly grated Parmesan for garnish (optional)**

Bring the broth to a simmer in a large, heavy saucepan. Add the chicken, reduce the heat to a gentle simmer, and poach until the chicken is firm and just cooked through, 3 to 5 min. Remove the chicken and, if the broth is cloudy, strain the liquid through a cheesecloth-lined strainer (this step isn't critical—it's just for looks).

Bring the broth back to a simmer in the saucepan, and add the carrots, cooking



**Although bland looking, these dumplings offer rich flavor, thanks to the chicken fat in the batter.**

until they're just tender, about 7 min. Remove them with a slotted spoon and set aside with the chicken.

Meanwhile, bring a pot of salted water to a boil and cook the egg noodles until they're *al dente*. Drain them and set aside.

When you're ready to serve the soup, bring the broth to a boil. Reduce the heat to a simmer. Add the peas, the cooked carrots, and the chicken, and simmer until everything is heated through. Add the cooked noodles, the parsley, and the thyme. Season with salt and pepper. Serve with Parmesan, if you want.

### **Chicken Soup with Rice, Lemon & Mint (Portuguese Canja)**

For a variation on this brightly flavored soup, you can add cooked linguica sausage instead of the chicken, or tiny rice-shaped pasta (orzo) instead of rice. *Serves four.*

**6 cups Golden Chicken Broth (recipe opposite)**  
**½ cup water**  
**½ tsp. coarse salt**  
**½ cup long-grain rice, preferably basmati**  
**1 boneless, skinless whole chicken breast, cut into 1x½-inch strips or ½-inch dice**  
**¼ cup fresh lemon juice**  
**Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste**  
**6 Tbs. chopped fresh mint leaves**

Combine ½ cup of the broth, the water, and the salt in a small, heavy saucepan. Bring to a boil and stir in the rice. Reduce the heat to low, cover the pan, and simmer until all the liquid is absorbed and the rice is just tender, 20 to 22 min.; set aside.

In a large, heavy saucepan, bring the remaining 5½ cups broth to a simmer over medium heat. Add the chicken, reduce the heat to a gentle simmer, and poach until the chicken is firm and just cooked through, 3 to 5 min. If the broth is cloudy, you can remove the chicken, strain the liquid through a cheesecloth-lined strainer, and return the chicken to the broth.

Add the reserved rice and the lemon juice and season with salt and pepper. Sprinkle on the mint and serve right away.

*Joyce Goldstein, the former chef-owner of Square One restaurant, is the author of Sephardic Flavors: Jewish Cooking of the Mediterranean and Cucina Ebraica: Flavors of the Italian Jewish Kitchen (both from Chronicle). ♦*



Delicate  
Lace Cookies,  
Surprisingly Easy  
to Make

Photo: Steve Hunter



# The trick to baking these crisp, paper-thin drop cookies is a good nonstick baking mat

BY ELINOR KLIVANS

**D**elicate and elegant, lace cookies look challenging to make. Named for the lace-like holes that form as they bake, these buttery cookies are light and crisp yet packed with a ton of flavor. It may surprise you then to learn that the batter is mixed in one pot with just a spoon and that these are actually simple drop cookies. The only catch is that you must line your baking sheets with a nonstick liner, something that actually makes clean-up a breeze.

## For a smooth batter, boil the ingredients

One of the things I love about lace cookies is that you can endlessly vary the flavor of the batter. The primary ingredients, however, are quite basic. Butter gives the cookies their buttery flavor, obviously, and a good amount of it is what helps them spread so thinly. Sugar or brown sugar and often corn syrup sweeten the cookies and give them their crisp texture. A bit of flour as well as some ground nuts or oatmeal thicken the batter and give it substance. Vanilla or other extracts, liqueurs, citrus zest, and spices will vary the flavor, as will using different nuts and adding chopped dried fruits, ginger, or coffee.

**No mixer or thermometer needed.** All you need for combining the ingredients is a spoon and a saucepan. The butter gets melted and boiled with the sugar and the corn syrup. This boiling reduces the traces of water found in the butter and corn syrup. Without the boiling, the excess water would cause the cookies to run all over the place. The ingredients only need to boil briefly; you don't need to cook them to any particular temperature. The rest of the ingredients are then stirred in off the heat.

## For perfect rounds, use a nonstick liner

Lining your baking sheets—I prefer heavy aluminum ones—with a nonstick liner is a crucial step. There's a variety of reusable nonstick liners on the market, ranging from about \$5 to \$20. On these liners, the cookies spread thinly, bake evenly, and come up easily. The cream of the crop is the imported Silpat/Exopat liner; it's a good investment if you bake a lot, but the cheaper versions work well, too (see



**Finely ground nuts give the batter some body.** A food processor makes quick work of grinding.



**A boiled batter—unusual but essential.** Take the pan off the heat soon after you see bubbles.



**A few quick stirs incorporate the dry ingredients.** The batter's texture remains quite soft.



**Ample room between cookies prevents “kissing.”** The nonstick liner encourages the incredible spreading.

Sources, p. 84). Kitchen parchment, most of which is treated with silicone, will work in a pinch, but the cookies don't spread as much and won't look as lacy, though they'll still be delicious. Simply greasing the pan results in misshapen cookies, and the cookies don't spread evenly on aluminum foil.

**Let the cookies firm up a bit before removing them.** Use a thin spatula to move them to a rack to cool and crisp further. If you plan to shape the cookies as shown at far right, however, you'll want to take them off the pan while still quite warm and malleable.

### Serving and storing lace cookies

Another great thing about these cookies is their versatility. I love to turn the flat rounds into sandwiches, like the Milk-Chocolate Pecan Sandwich at right. Jellies and jams also make great fillings. When filling the sandwiches with chocolate, let the melted chocolate firm up slightly first so that it doesn't seep too much through the tiny holes.

You can fill bowl-shaped cookies with ice cream, whipped cream, lemon curd, or any other soft filling. They can also hold slices of slightly sweetened fruit. If I'm planning to fill the cookies, I wait to do it until just before serving so the cookies stay crisp. I also have a few extra shells on hand in case one breaks. Even though they're bowl shaped, they should be served in a bowl or plate or things might get messy.

The cookies will stay crisp and flavorful for a few days wrapped in waxed paper or plastic wrap at room temperature. They also freeze well, but you'll want to store them in a tin or a sturdy plastic container to protect them from being jostled and crumbled.



**An impossibly thin cookie packs a ton of flavor.** Oatmeal and currants get just enough batter to hold them together.

## RECIPES

### Classic Lace Cookies

For a slightly thicker cookie that's easier to handle, melt four tablespoons of butter rather than five, which makes a thicker batter but still gives you lacy results. *Yields about 3 dozen 3-inch cookies.*

**2 oz. blanched almonds (to yield ½ cup ground almonds)**  
**2½ oz. (5 Tbs.) unsalted butter**



**Pecan lace cookies plus satiny milk chocolate make a sophisticated sandwich cookie.**

**⅓ cup sugar**  
**2 Tbs. light corn syrup**  
**1½ oz. (⅓ cup) all-purpose flour**  
**Pinch salt**  
**1 tsp. vanilla extract**

Position two oven racks in the middle and upper third of the oven. Heat the oven to 350°F. Line two baking sheets with nonstick liners, like the Silpat variety, or with parchment.

In a food processor, grind the almonds finely and measure out ½ cup. Heat the butter, sugar, and corn syrup in a medium saucepan over low heat, stirring often, until the butter melts and the sugar dissolves. Increase the heat to medium high and, stirring constantly, bring the mixture just to a boil. Remove the pot from the heat and stir in the flour and salt until incorporated. Stir in the ground almonds and vanilla extract.

Drop the batter by the teaspoon 3 inches apart on the baking sheets, about ½ dozen cookies per baking sheet. Bake the cookies until evenly light brown, about 10 min. total. About 5 min. into baking, switch the sheets from top to bottom and back to front to promote even baking. The cookies won't begin to spread until about 6 min. into baking.

Line a cooling rack with paper towels. Remove the cookies from the oven and, as soon as they're firm (which will take just a few minutes), use a wide spatula to transfer them to the rack to cool completely.

Bake off the remaining cookies; the batter will have firmed up a bit, but that's fine.

#### VARIATIONS:

- ◆ Add ½ tsp. almond extract for more almond flavor.
- ◆ Add 1 tsp. grated lemon zest or orange zest.
- ◆ Replace the ground almonds with ground hazelnuts.
- ◆ Dissolve 1 tsp. instant coffee with the sugar.
- ◆ Mix in 3 Tbs. very finely diced crystallized ginger.

### Cinnamon Currant Oatmeal Lace Cookies

These cookies, made with brown sugar, have a slightly softer texture than those made with granulated sugar. I like using currants for their flavor and also for their small size—they don't need chopping. But you can use chopped raisins or chopped dried cranberries instead. *Yields about 28 cookies.*



## Mold warm lace cookies into whimsical shapes

Because they're so thin and—initially—so pliable, still-warm lace cookies can be shaped all kinds of ways. Little tubes, made from rolling the cookie around a dowel or wooden spoon handle, are great for dipping into tea and coffee. I also like to turn the cookies into bowls for holding cream or fruit fillings. To do this, carefully remove the cookies from the baking sheet while still warm and soft and then drape them over a small overturned

glass. For a tuile, lay the cookies over a rolling pin. As soon as the cookies cool enough to become rigid, remove them from the mold, and they'll hold their shape. If the cookies on the baking sheet get too firm before you're done shaping them, pop them back into the hot oven for a minute. If you want large cups, use two or three teaspoons of batter for each cookie and leave at least four



inches between them on the baking sheet. The classic and pecan versions both work well for shaping; the currants in the oatmeal version tend to break through the cookie when shaped.



**2 oz. (4 Tbs.) unsalted butter**  
**½ cup packed light brown sugar**  
**2 Tbs. whipping cream**  
**½ tsp. vanilla extract**  
**½ tsp. ground cinnamon**  
**Pinch salt**  
**1 ¼ oz. (¼ cup) all-purpose flour**  
**1 ½ oz. (½ cup) oatmeal (not quick cooking)**  
**½ cup currants**

Position two oven racks in the middle and upper third of the oven. Heat the oven to 350°F. Line two baking sheets with nonstick liners, like the Silpat variety, or with parchment.

Heat the butter, brown sugar, and cream in a medium saucepan over low heat, stirring often, until the butter melts and the brown sugar dissolves. Increase the heat to medium high and, stirring constantly, bring the mixture just to a boil. Remove the pot from the heat and stir in the vanilla extract, cinnamon, and salt. Stir in the flour until incorporated and then stir in the oatmeal and currants. Drop the batter by the teaspoon 3 inches apart on the baking sheets, about ½ dozen cookies per baking sheet. Bake and cool the cookies following the directions in the Classic recipe at left.

### Milk-Chocolate Pecan Lace Cookie Sandwiches

Choose cookies of the same size to pair together and let the milk chocolate for the filling cool and thicken slightly before spreading it on so it doesn't drip through the lacy holes of the cookies. *Yields 15 sandwiches.*

**2 oz. pecans (to yield ½ cup ground pecans)**  
**2 oz. (4 Tbs.) unsalted butter**  
**⅓ cup sugar**

**2 Tbs. light corn syrup**  
**1 ½ oz. (⅓ cup) all-purpose flour**  
**Pinch salt**  
**1 tsp. vanilla extract**  
**½ cup coarsely chopped pecans**  
**4 oz. milk chocolate, chopped**

Position two oven racks in the middle and upper third of the oven. Heat the oven to 350°F. Line two baking sheets with nonstick liners, like the Silpat variety, or with parchment.

In a food processor, grind the 2 oz. of pecans finely and measure out ½ cup. Heat the butter, sugar, and corn syrup in a medium saucepan over low heat, stirring often, until the butter melts and the sugar dissolves. Increase the heat to medium high and, stirring constantly, bring the mixture just to a boil. Remove the pot from the heat and stir in the flour and salt until incorporated. Stir in the vanilla, ground pecans, and chopped pecans.

Drop the batter by the teaspoon 3 inches apart on the baking sheets, about ½ dozen cookies per baking sheet. Bake following the directions in the Classic recipe at left until evenly light brown, 11 to 12 min.

Melt the milk chocolate in a bowl in a microwave or over a water bath. Let it cool enough to thicken slightly.

Arrange the cookies in pairs of similar size. Turn half of the cookies bottom up. Leaving a ½-inch border around the edge, spread a thin layer of milk chocolate over the cookies that are bottom up. Gently place the remaining cookie, bottom down, onto the milk chocolate. Let the cookies sit until the filling firms, about 30 min.

*Elinor Klivans is a baker, a writer, and a cooking instructor. Her latest book, Fearless Baking, is due out in September from Simon & Schuster. ♦*

# Five Appetizers Add Up To a Festive Meal

Inspired by the Chinese concept of dim sum, these eclectic, do-ahead dishes make an appealing grazing menu

BY BARBARA HOM

**A**lthough I was born in San Francisco and an Chinese, I grew up in the predominantly Italian neighborhood of North Beach. Every day as I walked to my Chinese school, I would pass the Italian bakeries with their yeasty breads and focaccias and the delis with their sausages and cured meats. I knew back then that my love for food wouldn't be limited to the traditional Chinese meals we ate at home, but would somehow incorporate all that was wonderful and "exotic" about European food.

My cooking style today is neither Chinese nor European. I guess you could call it California eclectic. I really enjoy updating traditional ethnic dishes by changing an ingredient or technique to come up with



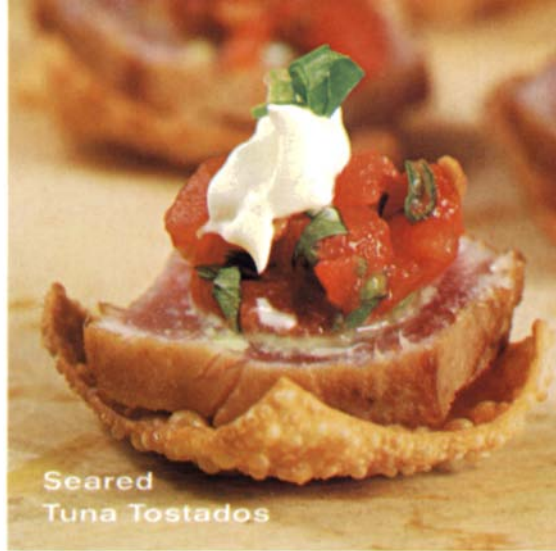




**Meatballs in  
Peanut Curry Sauce**



**Crunchy Chicken  
Drumettes**



**Seared  
Tuna Tostados**

something fresh and lively. You can't do this randomly—the new combination has to make sense and taste good—but when you do find just the right tweak, it can make a dish sing.

As a caterer, I like to serve these dishes in bite-size servings so people can sample lots of them and sort of graze their way through a meal. The menu I've put together here is my version of a grazing party with a decidedly Asian twist. I had the Chinese concept of dim sum in mind when creating it.

Traditionally, dim sum (which means “from the heart”) are little shrimp dumplings, meat buns, or small portions of savory noshes that are served in Chinese tearooms during lunch. But rather than try to recreate these classic dim sum dishes at home—they can be quite labor intensive and call for many hard-to-find ingredients—I'm offering recipes that are more in tune with my own cooking style: crunchy chicken drumettes; my hot curry Thai version of Swedish meatballs; fresh spring rolls filled with shrimp and wild mushrooms; and a Japanese-style seared tuna served on fried wonton wrappers with a fresh tomato salsa. The only truly Chinese part of this menu is the Shanghai scallion pancakes. The few unusual ingredients you'll need can be found at Asian groceries or by mail-order (see Sources, p. 84).

These dishes are wonderful for cocktail parties, football games, or any informal gathering where delicious nibbles and finger food are appropriate. You could even break up the menu, picking just one or two dishes as an unusual appetizer or first course. The drumettes and spring rolls are also great for picnics.

To make all these dishes for one party, consult the schedule on p. 61 when making your game plan.

#### **A few pointers and make-ahead tips**

Though these dishes aren't hard to make well, they do involve a lot of handwork—you've got to wrap, roll, shape, or assemble each individual serving.

**Scallion pancakes, also called Shanghai onion bread, are made from a simple flour and boiling water dough.** You divide this dough into pieces, roll each piece into a round, and sprinkle with toasted





**A Chinese version of puff pastry.** Barbara Hom's rolling technique for scallion pancakes creates flaky layers of dough with the herbs pressed in.

sesame seeds, scallions, and cilantro. The round is rolled up like a cigar, tied into a knot, and then rolled out again. At this point, the pancakes can be fried in oil or frozen between sheets of waxed paper. If you're freezing them, be sure to flour both sides so they don't stick to the paper when they thaw.

**Tuna tostados require very, very fresh fish.** This dish is a take-off on sushi. You sear the tuna in a hot, hot pan so it's browned outside and still rare inside. The seared tuna is sliced, set on crisp, deep-fried wonton skins, and topped with tomato salsa and *crème fraîche*. The salsa calls for shiso, an Asian herb whose flavor is a cross between oregano and cilantro. If you can't find it, use cilantro.

**When making spring rolls, have all the ingredients completely drained and cooled before wrapping them.** If the boiled shrimp, sautéed mushrooms, or vermicelli noodles are hot or wet, they'll cause the rice paper wrappers to soften and tear. Some wrappers will inevitably rip, so have extras on hand.

**Chicken drumettes are made by shoving the meat on a chicken wing into a ball at one end, like a lollipop.** My daughter calls these "chicken bones," and they're a favorite among her friends. It's less fussy to buy already butchered drumettes at the market—they're the fleshy first segment of the wing, which has the shape of a mini drumstick, but you can cut whole wings, too. It helps to start with very cold, even partially frozen, drumettes because they're easier to manipulate.

**Meatballs in peanut curry sauce is the most requested recipe from my chef colleagues.** Although I love this dish extremely hot, you might not, so add the curry paste a little at a time. Coconut milk gives the sauce its rich, silky quality. I use the thick, creamy part, which usually separates from the watery liquid if the milk is left undisturbed.



## Making crisp, flaky scallion pancakes

Roll out a piece of the divided dough into a 6-inch round and brush with sesame oil. Sprinkle liberally with salt, scallions, cilantro, and toasted sesame seeds.



Roll up the round very tightly, as you would a cigar, stretching the dough as you roll to lengthen it a bit.



Tie the ends around as if you were forming a knot, but stop before one end protrudes through the center hole.



Flatten the knot with your palm and then roll it out again into a 6-inch round. This creates layers of dough with the herbs pressed right in.



Scallion pancakes cook to golden crispness in about 5 minutes. A sprinkling of coarse salt and they're ready to serve.



## Shanghai Scallion Pancakes

These pan-fried flatbreads are crisp outside, slightly flaky inside, and rich with the flavor of scallions, cilantro, and sesame. Also called Shanghai onion bread, they're very delicious, and very addictive. *Yields 8 pancakes; serves eight.*

**4 cups (18 oz.) all-purpose flour**

**1½ cups boiling water**

**¼ cup toasted sesame oil**

**2 tsp. coarse salt; more for sprinkling**

**¼ cup minced scallions**

**¼ cup minced fresh cilantro**

**6 Tbs. sesame seeds, toasted in a dry skillet until golden**

**About 1¼ cups peanut oil**

Put the flour in a large bowl (I use a wooden salad bowl). Add the boiling water and stir until a shaggy dough forms. Gather the scraps together, pressing and kneading to form a dough ball. Knead the dough in the bowl or on a work surface, floured if necessary, until soft but not very sticky, about 8 min. The dough should be light and not very resilient; when you stick your finger in, a slight indentation should remain. Cover the dough with a damp towel and let rest for 15 min. Knead for another 3 min.

Put the sesame oil in a small bowl. Shape the dough into an even cylinder. Cut the cylinder into 8 equal pieces. Use a rolling pin to roll one piece into a 6-inch round. Brush the top with the sesame oil and then sprinkle on about ¼ tsp. salt, about ½ Tbs. each scallions and cilantro, and about 2 tsp. toasted sesame seeds. Roll up the pancake tightly, stretching to lengthen it slightly. Tie the ends of the cylinder around as if you were forming a knot (see the photo at left). Flatten the knotted ball on a lightly floured surface with your palm and then roll it out again into a 6-inch round. Repeat with the remaining pieces of dough.

In a large heavy skillet, pour enough peanut oil to come to a depth of ¼ inch. Heat the oil to 380°F (a rice noodle will puff into a curlicue within 3 seconds or a cube of bread will turn golden in 15 seconds). Fry one or two pancakes at a time until both sides are golden and slightly crisp, 2½ to 3 min. per side. Drain on paper towels and sprinkle immediately with coarse salt. Serve hot.

## Seared Tuna Tostados

Wasabi powder and fresh shiso (also called perilla and Japanese basil) are available at Asian food markets. The wasabi needs to be made at least two days ahead so the bitterness fades; it keeps for up to a month. The salsa will hold for a couple of days in the fridge. The tostados are fried wonton wrappers; egg roll wrappers also work. The tostados will stay crisp for one week if stored in an airtight container. They make great munchies, so you might want to fry extra. *Yields 24 tostados with 3 cups salsa; serves eight.*

**FOR THE WASABI PASTE:**

**¼ cup wasabi powder**

**¼ cup water**

## Plan ahead for a smooth party

Cook and prepare everything that you can beforehand, and then put the components for each dish into a separate baking pan (I call these "kits"). Don't forget to allow time for defrosting. The following schedule will help you plan the main cooking tasks for this menu.

### Up to one month ahead:

- ◆ Make the wasabi.
- ◆ Make and refrigerate the peanut curry sauce.
- ◆ Roll out and freeze the scallion pancake dough.
- ◆ Form the chicken drumettes and freeze.
- ◆ Shape and freeze the meatballs.

### Up to one week ahead:

- ◆ Fry the wonton tostados.

### Up to two days ahead:

- ◆ Make the drumette marinade.
- ◆ Make the salsa.

### One day ahead:

- ◆ Make the dipping sauce.
- ◆ Make and chill the spring rolls.
- ◆ Marinate the chicken drumettes.

### A few hours before the party:

- ◆ Fry the meatballs.
- ◆ Sear the tuna.

### An hour ahead:

- ◆ Assemble the tuna tostados.
- ◆ Heat the meatballs with the peanut curry sauce.

### Just before the guests arrive:

- ◆ Fry the drumettes.
- ◆ Fry the scallion pancakes.

### FOR THE WONTON TOSTADOS:

**Vegetable oil for frying**

**8 wonton wrappers, cut into quarters (about 2-inch squares)**

### FOR THE SALSA:

**1 lb. (about 4) plum tomatoes, peeled, seeded, and diced**

**4 fresh shiso leaves (or 1 Tbs. fresh cilantro), chopped**

**2 scallions, chopped**

**2 cloves garlic, minced**

**2 tsp. rice-wine vinegar**

**Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste**

### FOR THE TUNA:

**1 Tbs. soy sauce**

**1 Tbs. toasted sesame oil**

**1 tsp. slivered fresh ginger**

**Freshly ground black pepper to taste**

**1 lb. very fresh tuna steaks (ahi is best), cut into rectangular logs about 1¾ inches thick and 5 inches long**

**1 Tbs. vegetable oil**

### FOR THE GARNISH:

**½ cup crème fraîche or sour cream**

**⅓ cup chopped scallions**

**To make the wasabi paste**—At least two days before serving, mix the wasabi powder with the water to form a soft paste. Cover and refrigerate.

**To make the wonton tostados**—In a deep skillet, add oil to a depth of ½ inch. Heat the oil to 380°F— a rice noodle will puff into a curlicue within 3 seconds or a cube of bread will turn golden in 15 seconds. (If the oil isn't hot enough, the tostados absorb too much oil and get soggy and greasy after just a few hours.) Fry a few of the wonton squares at a time until they're

crisp and evenly golden on both sides, turning them during cooking if necessary, about 5 to 10 seconds. Lift out with tongs and drain on paper towels.

**To make the salsa**—In a bowl, stir together the tomatoes, shiso or cilantro, scallions, garlic, and rice-wine vinegar. Season with salt and pepper.

**To make the tuna**—In a bowl, combine the soy sauce, sesame oil, ginger, and pepper. Marinate the tuna in this sauce for 15 min. or up to 2 hours, turning it halfway through. Heat a cast-iron skillet over high heat with 1 Tbs. oil. When the oil is very hot—it will be smoking—put the tuna logs in the pan and sear, 20 to 30 seconds on each side; they should be seared outside and rare inside. Slice the logs into ¼-inch pieces.

**To assemble**—Put a piece of tuna on a wonton. Spread a touch of wasabi paste on the tuna (not too much; it's very hot). Top with a spoonful of salsa. Garnish with a bit of *crème fraîche* and scallions.

### Fresh Shrimp Spring Rolls

These rolls can be made a day ahead. Cover them with a damp paper towel and wrap well in plastic before refrigerating them. *Yields 16 rolls; serves eight.*

**2 Tbs. peanut oil**

**8 oz. chanterelle, shiitake, or other wild mushrooms, cut into thin strips (discard shiitake stems)**

**Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste**

**2 oz. thin rice vermicelli noodles**

**1 large carrot, shredded**

**1 tsp. sugar**

**¼ lb. shrimp, deveined, boiled, peeled, and chopped**

**¼ lb. fresh bean sprouts (1 heaping cup)**

**25 rice paper rounds, 8½ inches in diameter (some will tear, so you need extra)**

**8 large leaves Boston lettuce, ribs removed and discarded, leaves halved lengthwise**

**¾ cup fresh mint and cilantro leaves**

**16 chives, trimmed and cut into 3-inch pieces**

**Thai Dipping Sauce (see the recipe opposite)**

In a skillet, heat the oil on medium high. Add the mushrooms and sauté until golden brown and tender, about 5 min. Season with salt and pepper. Let cool.

In a saucepan, boil a few cups of water. Fill a bowl with about 2 cups of warm water. Boil the vermicelli noodles for 1 min., drain them, and put them in the warm water until they've softened, about 15 min. Drain them and set aside. Mix the carrots with the sugar and let stand for 10 min.

Divide the noodles, mushrooms, carrots, shrimp, and bean sprouts into 16 equal portions. Lay a kitchen towel on your work surface. Fill a pie plate or bowl with warm water and immerse one sheet of rice paper in it for a few seconds, just until it's soft and flexible. Put the rice paper on the towel and let it rest until it's more pliable, about 30 seconds. Put half a lettuce leaf on the bottom two-thirds of the rice paper, leaving a 2-inch border on the bottom edge. Put one portion of noodles on the bottom of the lettuce leaf, top with a portion of mushrooms, carrots, shrimp, and bean sprouts. Put a few mint and cilantro leaves on top.

Fold the bottom 2-inch border of the rice paper over the filling (see the photos at right). Fold over again to enclose the lettuce leaf. Fold in the right and left edges. Place 2 chives on the fold at the top of the

## A neat wrapping for fresh shrimp spring rolls



Immersing rice paper in warm water softens it up. Work with one at a time, be gentle, and have extra on hand since some will break.



Fold the bottom border over the filling ingredients, which should be cool and well drained.



Fold the spring roll over and then fold in the left and right sides.



Tuck two chives on top and finish folding. Cover the spring rolls with damp paper towels and wrap tightly in plastic until serving time.



filling, and continue rolling up the paper. Transfer the spring roll, seam side down, to a platter and cover with a damp paper towel. Repeat with the remaining sheets of rice paper and filling ingredients.

To serve, slice the rolls in half at a sharp angle, if you like, and let people dunk in the dipping sauce.

### Thai Dipping Sauce

Tamarind concentrate is available in jars at Asian groceries. As a substitute, use cherry juice concentrate, available in health-food stores, or a bit of orange marmalade and fresh lemon juice. *Yields a scant 1/2 cup.*

- 2 Tbs. sugar**
- 2 Tbs. water**
- 1 Tbs. fresh lime juice**
- 1 Tbs. tamarind concentrate or cherry juice concentrate**
- 2 tsp. fish sauce (*nam pla*)**
- 1 tsp. chopped fresh cilantro**
- 1 tsp. chopped garlic**
- 1 tsp. small slivers of seeded red serrano chile**

In a small saucepan or the microwave, heat the sugar and water so the sugar dissolves. Mix in the lime juice, tamarind concentrate, and fish sauce, stirring until smooth. Let cool slightly and stir in the cilantro, garlic, and chile. The sauce should be tangy and slightly sour.

### Crunchy Chicken Drumettes

Water chestnut powder gives the chicken a crunchy coating; it can be found in Asian food markets and sometimes in supermarkets' international sections, but you can use cornstarch instead. You can fry these a couple of hours ahead and reheat them in the oven, although they're best when freshly made. *Yields 24 drumettes; serves eight.*

- 24 very cold chicken drumettes or whole wings**
- 2 Tbs. dry sherry**
- 1/4 cup soy sauce**
- 1 Tbs. minced garlic**
- 1 Tbs. minced fresh ginger (unpeeled)**
- 1 Tbs. minced scallions**
- 1 Tbs. minced fresh cilantro**
- 1/2 tsp. freshly ground black pepper**
- About 2 1/2 qt. canola or other vegetable oil**
- 1 large egg** (Ingredient list continues)



Using the first section of the wing, cut around the tip of the narrower end to release the skin and meat.

## Making chicken drumettes



Pull the meat down toward the wider end, cutting any tendons with a knife if necessary. The meat should end up in a ball at one end, with the skin inside and the flesh outside.



Dip the drumettes in water chestnut powder for a delightful crunch.



Fry the drumettes in small batches so the oil temperature stays high and you get crisp chicken.



## Try an earthy Pinot Noir with berry fruit and moderate tannins

Pinot Noir's earthy, mushroom aromas, red fruit notes, and moderate tannins are perfect for this menu, says Barbara Hom. She particularly loves how Pinot pairs with soy-flavored dishes like the chicken drumettes, as well as with the mushrooms in the spring rolls, the tuna in

the tostados, and even the spicy peanut sauce for the meatballs. Barbara's favorites hail from Sonoma's Russian River Valley and include Lynmar, Davis Bynum, and Joseph Swan, all \$20 to \$25.

Or I'd suggest a California Blanc de Noirs, which contains Pinot Noir. Well-made

examples emulate the style of rosé Champagne: dry, pink-tinted, and refreshing, they're easy to drink and can handle all the dishes here. You'll need one that's fairly assertive: Blanc de Noirs from Gloria Ferrer, Domaine Chandon, or Domaine Mumm fit the bill (all about \$13.)

For non-wine drinkers, there's always beer, which many people like to drink with dim sum for its affinity to salty and spicy flavors. Stick with a light lager or pale ale, like Tsing Dao or Sierra Nevada.

*Amy Albert is an associate editor for Fine Cooking.*

**1½ cups water chestnut powder (Guang Xao and Chi Kong are good brands) or cornstarch**  
**Hot honey mustard (or Dijon mustard flavored with honey) for dipping**

**To prepare the drumettes**—If using whole wings, cut off and discard the wing tips and the middle part of the wing, saving the first section; this is the drumette. Cut around the tip of the smaller end of the drumette to release the skin and meat (see the photos on p. 63). With your fingers, pull the meat down toward the larger end, cutting through any tendons with a knife if necessary. The meat should end up in a sack at the end of the bone, with the skin inside and the flesh outside.

**To make the marinade**—In a large bowl, mix the sherry, soy sauce, garlic, ginger, scallions, cilantro, and pepper. Add the drumettes, tossing to coat. Cover and refrigerate for at least 6 hours or overnight.

**To fry the chicken**—Line a plate with paper towels. In a deep, heavy pot, pour in enough oil to come about 2½ inches up the sides and heat until it reaches 380°F (a rice noodle will puff into a curlicue within 3 seconds at this temperature; a cube of bread turns golden in 15 seconds). While the oil is heating, drain the marinade from the chicken and discard it. Beat the egg, pour it over the chicken, and toss to coat. Put the water chestnut powder or cornstarch in a deep dish or pie plate. Holding the chicken by the bone, dip the meaty part in the powder so it's well coated. Lightly shake off the excess and place it in the hot oil. Repeat with as many drumettes as will fit without crowding.

Cook the drumettes until they're golden, turning so they brown evenly, about 4 min. Remove with a slotted spoon or skimmer and set on the lined plate. Repeat the dipping and frying with another batch of drumettes, adjusting the heat to keep the oil temperature constant. Serve hot with the mustard for dipping.

### Meatballs in Peanut Curry Sauce

Thick canned coconut milk tames the fire in this curry. The brand I buy (Chao Koh) develops a thick, creamy layer on top if you don't shake the can before opening it. *Yields 32 to 40 meatballs; serves eight.*

**½ cup all-purpose flour**  
**1½ tsp. coarse salt**  
**¼ tsp. freshly ground black pepper**  
**1 lb. ground beef, medium lean (80 or 85%)**  
**2 Tbs. vegetable oil; more if necessary**  
**4 cloves garlic, coarsely chopped**  
**1 Tbs. red curry paste (I like Krung Gaeng Ped brand); more to taste**  
**1 cup canned coconut milk (refrigerate the can, don't shake it, and use the thick cream at the top)**  
**2 Tbs. chunky peanut butter**  
**2 tsp. fish sauce (*nam pla*) or to taste**  
**1½ Tbs. sugar or to taste**  
**1 tsp. chopped fresh mint or basil leaves for garnish**

Put the flour on a plate. Sprinkle the salt and pepper on the beef and mix well. Shape the beef into small, firm balls about 1-inch in diameter; you'll get 32 to 40. Roll the meatballs in the flour, dusting off the excess.

Line a plate with paper towels. In a wok or frying pan, heat the oil on high until it's hot. Fry the garlic until browned, about 1 min.; remove and set aside.



**Coconut milk is the critical behind-the-scenes ingredient. Refrigerate the can so the cream rises and hardens, making it easy to scoop out.**

## Making a rich, silky curry sauce



**Peanut butter and coconut milk melt into the curry paste, making a smooth, unctuous sauce.**



**Rolling the meatballs around right in the pan warms them up and ensures a complete coating of sauce.**

Add the meatballs and sear them on high heat, stirring and tilting the pan, until they're browned evenly and cooked through, about 5 min.; do this in batches, if necessary. Using a slotted spoon, transfer the meatballs to the paper-towel lined plate to drain.

If no oil remains in the pan, add 2 tsp. and fry the red curry paste so it releases its aromas, about 2 min., stirring with a wooden spoon to prevent sticking. Add the reserved garlic and the cream of the coconut milk and then stir in the peanut butter. Cook and stir to get a smooth, uniform consistency, about 1 min. Taste and add fish sauce, sugar, or more curry paste to taste; the sauce shouldn't be too sweet.

Return the meatballs to the pan with the sauce and simmer over low heat until they're hot, about 2 min. Transfer to a serving dish and garnish with the mint or basil sprinkled on top.

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*Barbara Hom is the owner of Night Owl Catering in Santa Rosa, California. ♦*



# Fabulous French Fries at Home



For crisp-on-the-outside,  
creamy-on-the-inside fries,  
soak the potatoes overnight  
and fry them twice

**BY MICHAEL YEAMANS**

One of the things we're known for at Rouge is our fries (or as we say on our menu, our *pommes frites*). Long, skinny, with a bit of skin left on, they're served hot and crisp, browned on the outside with a creamy white interior. While I don't want to sway people from coming here to enjoy our great fries, french fries don't have to be restaurant fare only. In fact, fries are one of the few things from my menu that I do make at home, mostly because they're a favorite of my five-year-old son.

French fries aren't hard to make. It's the large amount of oil needed to fry properly that freaks



**Even slicing is about more than good looks.** The same-size julienne guarantees that a whole handful of fries cooks evenly, and so tastes equally great.



**A long soak keeps fries from becoming greasy.**

people out. But as long as you leave some room at the top of the pot, deep-frying causes less mess than pan-frying, something most of us do without a second thought.

The ample oil actually makes the fries less greasy because it cooks them more quickly and consistently; the temperature won't lower too much when you add the potatoes. You can also reuse the oil at least once: let it cool before straining it through a fine-mesh sieve into the container in which it came and then store it, covered, in the refrigerator. To dispose of it neatly, pour it through a funnel back into the same container and toss the whole thing out.

### **Cut potatoes long and thin and soak them well**

For great fries, you need to soak the julienned potatoes in water for at least eight hours but preferably 24 hours before frying. This means you have to plan ahead, but it also spreads out the little bit of work required.

**Use baking potatoes for frying, and leave the skin on.** I like russets, which are also called Idahoes, for their texture and potato-y flavor. I also like the dramatic length you can get from these potatoes. Don't bother peeling them—the contrasting bit of skin left on the end looks and tastes great—but do scrub them well and cut out any eyes or dark spots.

At the restaurant, we use the largest julienne setting on our mandoline to cut the potatoes into long lengths about ¼-inch square at the end. If you have a mandoline or other mechanical slicer but it doesn't have such a setting, use it to slice the potatoes into ¼-inch-thick slices, and then cut those by hand into a ¼-inch julienne. At home, I cut the potatoes entirely by hand using a large, sharp chef's knife. To keep the potato from rolling, cut a thin slice off the length of the potato, and then lay the potato down on that side for a steady base.

**Soak the potatoes at room temperature and dry them well.** I had always presumed that the soaking step simply washed away any excess starch, but food scientist and *Fine Cooking* contributing editor Shirley O. Corriher offers another reason: to plump up the cells within the potatoes to result in an improved texture.

Keep the soaking potatoes at room temperature rather than chilling them to prevent the starches from turning to sugar, which would make the fries brown before they're cooked. You also want to be sure that they're dry before plunging them in the oil. For one thing, the excess water would lower the temperature of the oil and produce greasy fries. (For more on the science of frying potatoes, see p. 80.)

### **Frying twice gives you the best texture**

The uncontested, hands-down best way to make french fries is to fry them once at a lower temperature to cook them through and then again at a higher temperature to brown and crisp them. If you simply plunge the potatoes into oil hot enough to brown them, they'll look great but will be hard and uncooked inside. If you cook them at a lower temperature until browned, the water inside would steam away before the potatoes are browned, creating greasy fries.

The double frying also takes the pressure off the cook. You can give the potatoes their initial fry, which is also called blanching, a couple of hours ahead of the second fry. (They'll look pale and limp, but they get rejuvenated in the second fry.) When you want to serve them, simply reheat the same pot of oil and fry the potatoes briefly. Because the potatoes are already cooked, all you have to do is take the fries out of the oil when they're golden brown.

**A couple of tools make frying a breeze.** If you don't have one, get a frying (or candy) thermometer to track the oil's temperature; they're inexpensive and come in handy for many other recipes as well. A Chinese skimmer works great for fishing out the fries; a slotted spoon works, too, but less efficiently. You'll also want to have a cooling rack handy for draining the french fries. Tongs are also helpful during the blanching to test the doneness of a single fry, the best method being to let the fry cool a bit and then taking a bite.



**Salt the fries right out of the pot.** At the restaurant, we sprinkle them with finely ground sea salt and black pepper; the latter is a personal preference. Season the fries as soon as they're done; the seasonings cling best then. The fries taste best served at once.

## RECIPE

### French Fries

Pick the longest potatoes you can find for the best-looking fries. *Serves four, although two hungry people could probably polish them off.*

**3 lb. Idaho potatoes, scrubbed well to remove all dirt, any eyes or dark spots cut out with a paring knife**  
**Peanut or vegetable oil, enough for deep-frying, about 4 qt.**

**Salt (ideally fine sea salt)**

**Freshly ground black pepper (optional)**

Don't peel the potatoes. Slice them into ¼-inch-square strips that are as long as possible. Soak the sliced potatoes in ample water at room temperature for at least 8 hours and up to 24 hours.

Remove the potatoes from the water and dry well with paper towels; otherwise, the oil will spatter.

In a deep pot, heat the oil to 300°F (use a candy thermometer to check). Set a cooling rack over a baking sheet. Working in batches so as to not crowd the pot, fry the potatoes until cooked through but not colored, about 5 min. You'll likely have to turn up the heat after adding the potatoes to keep the oil's temperature near 300°F.

Using a Chinese skimmer or a slotted spoon, carefully transfer the blanched potatoes to the cooling rack. Repeat until all the potatoes are blanched. Reserve the oil in the pot. The blanching can be done up to 2 hours ahead of the final frying; turn the burner off and keep the blanched potatoes at room temperature.

To finish the fries, heat the oil to 375°F. Line a baking sheet with paper towels. Again working in batches, cook the potatoes until golden brown, 3 to 5 min. Immediately transfer the fries to the paper towels. Quickly season with salt (and pepper, if you like) and serve immediately.

*Michael Yeamans is the chef at Rouge in Philadelphia.* ♦

## A double dunk in hot, then hotter oil makes the best fries



**The first fry cooks the potatoes but doesn't color them.** The bubbling oil below them shows that steam is still rushing out of the potatoes, a very good sign.



**The second fry browns and crisps.** Season the fries with salt (and with pepper, if you like) and serve them while they're hot.

# Flipping for Spatulas

Choose the best spatula for the job—thin and slotted for delicate cookies, strong and sharp for lasagna and brownies

BY SUSIE MIDDLETON



**For fish filets, frittatas, and anything fragile,** a flexible, slotted spatula with a slight curve is the best tool.



**For buttery cookies, flaky cheese coins, and delicate macaroons,** a light-weight slotted spatula with a bit of flex offers little resistance and won't break the goods.



**For quiche, pie, or even clafoutis,** a pie-shaped server may seem like a luxury—until you need it.



**For scrambled eggs and low-fat sautés,** a one-piece nylon spatula is efficient and strong—and it won't scratch your pan.

If I asked you what your favorite kitchen utensil is, I imagine you'd say a well-worn wooden spoon, a pair of spring-loaded tongs, or even a whisk. My guess is that you wouldn't say a spatula. But I bet you could be persuaded to fall in love with your spatula if only you had the right one (or ones). Start by throwing away that old thing with the rusty rivets and the two-foot-long handle (designed to protect you from those dangerous pancakes, I guess) and invest in a few shiny new spatulas with features you'll really appreciate.

Before you start shopping, consider the kind of cooking you do and the types of problems you'd like to solve. Are you looking for a light, ultra-thin spatula to get underneath a delicate cookie or a lacy cheese crisp and whisk it away to a cooling rack in one piece? Do you often find yourself wrestling with gooey casseroles, like lasagna or enchiladas? Are you the flip-it-in-the-frying-pan kind of cook? Do you like to make pancakes on Sunday morning, or sauté a fillet of sole on Friday nights? Maybe you like to make brownies, or fudge, or lemon bars—all of those yummy, sticky things that need to be coerced out of the baking pan. Believe it or not, there's a different spatula that works best for each of these jobs.

To find the right spatula for the task, consider material, construction, size, shape, thickness, and strength. For most uses, choose a spatula with a stainless-steel blade. Top-quality stainless blades are often made from high-carbon steel, which keeps an edge well and gives manufacturers the option of putting a sharp beveled edge along the top of the blade (great for marking or cutting pieces before lifting them). If you're looking for a spatula to use in a non-



stick pan, don't choose a stainless-steel blade—you'll want one made of nylon or another synthetic material that won't scratch the finish on your cookware.

Which is the best material for the grip? My three favorites are wood handles, molded plastic handles, and rubberized handles. All three of these materials are comfortable and durable. Wood has the disadvantage of discoloring if put through the dishwasher, but it feels and looks nice. I see a lot of tools on the market with sleek metal handles. They're eye-catching, but they're not my favorite. They don't feel secure to hold, and the metal's more likely to conduct heat to your hand. And for some reason, many of these spatulas are very long; I prefer a shorter grip, like that of a garden trowel, for easier handling.

Ideally, a metal spatula will be one-piece (or full-tang) construction. In other words, the metal from the blade continues down through the handle to the base of the spatula. The handle is then riveted to the metal. Full-tang spatulas are much stronger and less likely to bend and break than spatulas made of two pieces of metal riveted together where blade and handle meet. For this reason, I like the one-piece synthetic spatulas made for nonstick pans (as opposed to a nylon blade attached to a metal or wood handle.)

Owning spatulas in a variety of sizes is really handy. I

bought my first "giant" spatula when I worked in a professional kitchen with a large griddle. Yet once I brought this spatula home, I found all kinds of uses for it—transferring a just-baked galette from a baking sheet to a cooling rack, lifting pizza and bread off my bakingstone, and tucking under a roasted pork loin to transfer it to a cutting board, to name a few. I find my smallest spatulas indispensable for baking pastries and hors d'oeuvres (many professional bakers have their favorite mini spatulas), and a strong, medium-size spatula is perfect for cutting just the right size pieces of brownies or gingerbread.

As a rule, the thinner and more delicate your food (whether it's a cookie or a fish fillet), the thinner and more delicate your spatula should be. Thin metal spatulas aren't hard to find, but be sure to compare the edges of synthetic spatulas made for nonstick pans. Some of them are much too thick for sliding under delicate or sticky food. Thin metal spatulas can be square or rectangular, but you'll often find them in a wedge shape, as the wider area at the top allows you to slide under the food and the narrower base gives you control.

Choose a thin spatula with slots in it. It's true that slotted spatulas are great for separating food from cooking fat, but I really like them because spatulas with more slots than metal create less drag, sliding



For blinis, fritters, or mini pastries, this small square spatula with a medium-thick blade is handy.



For cutting brownies, lemon bars, or bread pudding, a stiff blade with a beveled edge and an offset handle works best.



For bigger pancakes and patties or light casseroles, a spatula with a medium-thick edge does the job.



For moving a roast, transferring a galette, or lifting a loaf of bread, this giant offset spatula is surprisingly efficient.

under food with much less resistance. This is why the slotted spatulas on the opposite page are two of my very favorites. The larger one, with a slightly up-curving lip, is called a fish spatula, and it's good for cradling a fragile fillet. But its curves also make it useful for sliding into the "corners" of a skillet or a pie pan, if you have a frittata or a potato pancake or even a giant popover that needs a little coaxing to release.

For dense foods, you'll want a spatula with a stiffer, thicker blade. A beveled top edge makes cutting and lifting pieces of lasagna or brownies easier. An offset handle is good for digging into casseroles or getting into a crowded pan of pancakes. These stronger spatulas can be square or rectangular and come in many sizes. The shorter, squarish blades are best for desserts like gingerbread and brownies (you can cut nice portion sizes). But a longer, more rectangular blade might be best for lasagna and casseroles.

Now that you've considered what a new spatula can do for you, take a look at the eight pictured here (prices range from \$5 to \$30; see Sources, p. 84), and check out the options in the marketplace. You're sure to find a spatula or two that feels made for you.

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Susie Middleton is the executive editor of Fine Cooking. ♦

# A Touch of Dairy Makes Pound Cakes Moist and Fine-Grained

Adding a little sour cream, buttermilk, or cream cheese improves the flavor and texture of this favorite traditional cake

BY CAROLYN WEIL

**P**ound cake is the mother of all butter cakes. While it's pretty humble—blocky shape, no layers, frostings, or fillings—pound cake's dense, velvety texture and pure butter flavor make it so undeniably delicious that, in my opinion, it ranks far ahead of many more complicated or elegant cakes.

Traditional pound cakes actually were made with one pound each of butter, sugar, eggs, and flour (in France they're called *quatre quarts* or “four quarters”). These old-style cakes are quite good, but on the verge of being too solid for my taste.

On my recent quest for the perfect pound cake, I looked through the recipes that I've amassed over years of owning a bakery and teaching baking. I pulled out the ones I remembered as being exceptionally good, and I soon noticed a pattern: all of my favorite pound cake recipes broke from the traditional formula and contained some leavening (baking powder or baking soda) and an additional dairy product—buttermilk, sour cream, or cream cheese. The addition of both of these types of ingredients seems to make a slightly moister, lighter textured cake that still has that fine-crumbed “sliceability” and mellow butter flavor of the traditional version.

Baking is really a big chemistry experiment, and your choice of ingredients and the way you handle them can radically change the nature of a cake. Let's take a look at pound cake's big five—butter, sugar, eggs, dairy, and flour—to see what they do. These



**High-tech, low-tech.** Carolyn Weil uses her stand mixer for most of the process, but she does the final blending of the flour with a rubber spatula to avoid overworking the batter.

Photos: Martha Holmberg





**Dairy ingredients contribute moisture and richness to the basic pound cake recipe.**

principles apply not only to pound cake, but to many other cakes as well.

**Creaming butter and sugar correctly creates air pockets to lighten the cake**

A lot of baking recipes will tell you to use softened or room-temperature butter, but how soft is soft enough? Surprisingly, you don't want the butter to be too soft or it won't do its job. The purpose of creaming the butter, on its own and then with the sugar, is to aerate it, whipping in tiny pockets of air that will eventually expand during cooking and help to lighten the cake. If the butter is too soft, it won't be able to hold those pockets.

**You should be able to pick up the stick of butter and bend it without it melting in your fingers or becoming glistening or sticky.** If you want to be sure, take its temperature with an instant-read thermometer—70°F is good. Once you start creaming, you should cream until the butter forms little tails around the paddle or beaters of your mixer.

Pure cane granulated sugar is my preference for baking, but superfine is acceptable for these recipes. Whichever sugar you use, you're going to add it to the creamed butter and cream some more until the mixture is pale, which incorporates more air into the

**Lemon Butter-milk Pound Cake has a tangy-sweet glaze that contrasts deliciously with a spoonful of plain whipped cream.**



mix. Even though you're "creaming," the mixture will look quite grainy, not creamy, because there's a lot of sugar and it's not dissolving in the butter.

### Warmed eggs, worked in slowly, create an emulsion—that's important

Fresh, large (2-ounce) eggs are what I call for in my recipe. Most important, the eggs need to be at room temperature so they don't harden the butter when you add them. You can speed up the process by put-

**Tails tell the tale.** For the creaming phase to be effective in lightening the texture of the cake, start with 70°F butter and cream it until lots of little tails form around the beaters or paddle.



ting the eggs (in their shells) in a bowl of warm tap water for 6 to 8 minutes.

When you add the eggs, do it one at a time, using a slow speed on your mixer. You're trying to create a creamy mixture that holds the air bubbles that have already been whipped in. At this point, you're beginning to create an emulsion, which is the most important step in making the pound cake. A well-emulsified batter will trap and hold air bubbles that then expand during baking. This produces the rise and is a major factor in the final texture of the cake. A cake baked from a poorly emulsified batter will be grainy and uneven and can sink.

The emulsion begins with the butter, eggs, and sugar and continues while you add the dry ingredients (and the buttermilk in one of my recipes; the cream cheese or sour cream get mixed with the butter and behave more like that than like a liquid). You



**Creamed but not creamy.** Once you add the sugar to the creamed butter, the mixture will look grainy—that's okay.

## It's all in the mix

The order in which you add ingredients and the manner in which you mix them in makes a huge difference in the degree of success you and your cakes will enjoy. Here are some tips that will produce lighter, smoother, better-textured cakes:

**Alternating makes wet and dry blend without a struggle.** Many cake recipes (including the Lemon Buttermilk Pound Cake) tell you to alternate the addition of wet and dry ingredients. While this might seem like extra work, it's really important. If you were to add all the liquid first, the mixture would be very soupy, and the emulsion would break. You'd also have a hard time blending in the flour because it would tend to clump and lump in the liquid.

Adding all the flour first would create a very thick, pasty batter that would then require a lot of beating in

order to incorporate the liquid. All the extra beating would toughen the cake.

The alternation of dry-wet-dry also keeps the emulsion in a steady state.

**Enthusiasm, yes, but vigorous mixing, no.** During all stages of mixing, use restraint:

- ◆ Overbeating the **butter** can soften it too much, making it greasy, which will diminish its ability to trap air.
- ◆ Overbeating the **eggs** whips in too much air and creates tunnels in the finished cake.
- ◆ Overbeating once the **flour** has been added promotes gluten formation and toughens the cake.

want to prevent the emulsion from breaking, which would make it look like little curds floating in syrup. Sometimes if a recipe has too little sugar or too many eggs, the emulsion will start to break. To rescue the emulsion, add a little of the flour mixture, one tablespoon at a time, to maintain it.

### Extra dairy adds tangy flavor and loads of moisture

Adding buttermilk, sour cream, or cream cheese gives more moisture and flavor to the cake. The acid in buttermilk and sour cream produces a very fine crumb because it tenderizes the gluten in the flour. Sour cream and cream cheese add so much richness that cakes made with them are super moist and almost springy. They consequently keep very well.

### Flour should be measured well and mixed in with a light touch

Many flours work for pound cakes, but they produce different textures, and I don't think they're all



equally successful. Cake flour gives the pound cake a texture that's so light and fine-grained that to me it seems almost dry. Bleached all-purpose will give the cake a more substantial texture than cake flour will—the results are moist and almost chewy. Unbleached all-purpose is my preference. The final texture is slightly coarser than bleached or cake flour, but the flavor is slightly deeper and nuttier. Maybe it's just that I always bake with unbleached, but to me it tastes better.

When I measure flour, I always stir it to loosen it (I keep a chopstick in the canister) and then spoon it into a dry measuring cup and swipe it level with the flat edge of a knife. I've also given weights in my recipes, so if you have a scale, by all means, use it. To incorporate the leavening, I whisk it into the flour briefly rather than sifting the whole thing. This seems to distribute it enough and is quicker than sifting, which is just extra work, in this case.

**When adding flour to the batter, be gentle.** I make pound cakes using my stand mixer. I'll work the batter on low speed until most of the flour has been mixed in but I can still see some unblended powder; then I'll take the bowl from the mixer and finish mixing by hand with a spatula. That way I can scrape to the bottom of the bowl to get any little pockets of flour, but I'm not adding any unnecessary strokes. Overmixing at this point can really make the cake tough. (Note that for the buttermilk pound cake recipe, you'll need to alternate adding the flour mixture with the buttermilk; see the sidebar at left.)

### **A light pan and a low oven produce a golden, tender crust**

Pound cakes are almost always baked in a loaf shape, though a bundt shape works really well, too. A lot of recipes call for a 9x5x4-inch loaf pan, but in reality that size is next to impossible to find. Every manufacturer seems to do things a little differently, so just try for something close. I tested these recipes in a pan that measured 8x4½x3 inches at the top rim.

I prefer a light-colored steel pan. I had been using a darker pan at first, but the outer surface of the finished cake was too dark. I kept adjusting the time and temperature without much success. Then I coincidentally did a test at 325°F using a lighter, silvery colored pan and the timing worked perfectly, producing a honey-brown crust that was very tender.

I use a nonstick spray coating to grease the pan (I prefer Pam brand), but I don't feel flouring it is necessary, except when I'm using a bundt pan that might have a harder time releasing because of the indentations. Nonstick pans still need grease—they wash up easier, but really, cakes still stick.

**The trick to removing a pound cake from the pan is to do it while the cake is still slightly warm**—15 to 20 minutes after removing it from the oven. If you try it immediately, the cake will be too fragile and could get damaged. Turn the pan over and, with a gentle tap, let the cake slide out. You can then put the cake on a rack to let it finish cooling. If you mistakenly wait too long, try warming the outside of the pan over a flame or in a warm oven to help release the cake. *(Recipes follow)*

## What to look for in a better batter



**One egg too many.** We forced this butter-sugar-egg emulsion to break by adding an extra egg. The emulsion couldn't hold the extra liquid, and the result is curds of fat in a watery syrup. If this happens to you, fix it by beating in 1 to 2 tablespoons of the flour mixture.



**This is an emulsified batter.** Though you can see some texture from air pockets, you don't see curds or weeping because the butter and liquid are in a stable dispersion.



**Pan color determines crust color.** Dark pans absorb more heat and tend to make a darker, tougher crust. Carolyn Weil prefers the golden results from the lighter colored pan on the left.



**Cream Cheese & Wild Blueberry Cake makes a wonderful breakfast bread, as well as a dessert or tea cake. Its moist texture makes slicing easy.**

### Sour Cream Pound Cake

The three extracts I use here create an intriguingly delicious flavor. You can make this cake with only the vanilla, but try the recipe first as written. *Yields one large bundt cake; serves eight to ten.*

- 11¼ oz. (2½ cups) all-purpose unbleached flour**
- 2 tsp. baking powder**
- ½ tsp. salt**
- 8 oz. (1 cup) unsalted butter, slightly soft (70°F)**
- 2½ cups sugar**
- 5 large eggs, at room temperature**
- 1 tsp. pure vanilla extract**
- 2 tsp. almond extract**
- ½ tsp. coconut extract**
- 1 cup sour cream**
- ½ cup golden raisins or currants (optional)**

Heat the oven to 300°F. Spray a large (10- to 12-cup) bundt pan with a nonstick coating and dust with flour.

Whisk together the flour, baking powder, and salt until well blended. With an electric mixer (I use the paddle attachment on my stand mixer), beat the butter until it's very pale and little tails have formed. Sprinkle in the sugar and beat well until slightly fluffy. Scrape the sides of the bowl well. Add the eggs one at a time, beating until blended before adding the next. Add the extracts and sour cream; mix well. With the mixer on low, add the flour and mix until it's almost incorporated but not quite. Switch from the mixer to a stiff rubber spatula and fold until the batter is well blended and smooth, taking care to scrape the bowl's bottom and sides. Gently fold in the raisins or currants, if using.

Scrape the batter into the prepared pan and bake in the center of the oven until the cake is golden brown and a toothpick comes out with just a few crumbs clinging to it when inserted in the center, 60 to 75 min. Baking time will vary depending on pan size and depth, so start checking at about 50 min. Let the cake cool for about 15 min. and then invert it onto a large plate or platter, tapping the pan to release the cake. Slide the cake onto a rack and cool completely before serving.

### Lemon Buttermilk Pound Cake

*Yields one 8x5-inch loaf.*

- 6¾ oz. (1½ cups) all-purpose unbleached flour**
- 1 tsp. baking powder**
- ½ tsp. salt**
- 4 oz. (½ cup) unsalted butter, slightly soft (70°F)**
- 1 cup sugar**
- 2 large eggs, at room temperature**
- ½ cup buttermilk**
- Zest of 1 lemon, finely chopped or grated**
- FOR THE SYRUP:**
- Juice of 1 lemon**
- 3 to 4 Tbs. confectioners' sugar**

Heat the oven to 325°F. Spray a loaf pan that's about 8x5x3 inches with a nonstick coating.

Whisk together the flour, baking powder, and salt until well blended. With an electric mixer (I use the paddle attachment on my stand mixer), beat the butter until it's very pale and little tails have formed. Sprinkle





in the sugar and beat well until slightly fluffy. Scrape the sides of the bowl well. Add the eggs one at a time, beating until blended before adding the next. With the mixer on low, add about one-third of the flour and mix until almost combined; then add half the buttermilk and mix until just combined. Repeat with another third of flour, and then the last half of the buttermilk, ending with the last third of the flour. Just before all the flour is incorporated, switch from the mixer to a stiff rubber spatula, add the lemon zest, and slowly stir to blend in the flour and zest, taking care to scrape the bowl's bottom and sides.

Scrape the batter into the prepared pan and bake until the cake is golden brown and a toothpick comes out with just a few crumbs clinging to it when inserted in the center, 45 to 50 min. Let the cake cool for about 10 min.; as it's cooling, stir together the lemon juice and confectioners' sugar. Carefully invert the loaf pan, tap it to release the cake, and then brush the syrup on the cake while it's still warm. Cool completely on a rack before serving.

### **Cream Cheese & Wild Blueberry Pound Cake**

Most grocery stores carry frozen wild blueberries now. Don't let them thaw or the juices will streak the batter. *Yields one 8x5-inch loaf.*

- 6¾ oz. (1½ cups) all-purpose unbleached flour**
- ½ tsp. baking powder**
- ½ tsp. salt**
- 3 oz. cream cheese, at room temperature (I like Philadelphia brand)**

- 4 oz. (½ cup) unsalted butter, slightly soft (70°F)**
- 1½ cups sugar**
- 4 large eggs, at room temperature**
- 1 tsp. pure vanilla extract**
- 1 tsp. grated lemon zest**
- 1 cup wild blueberries**

Heat the oven to 325°F. Spray a loaf pan that's about 8x5x3 inches with a nonstick coating.

Whisk together the flour, baking powder, and salt until well blended. With an electric mixer (I use the paddle attachment on my stand mixer), beat the cream cheese and butter until very pale and little tails have formed. Sprinkle in the sugar and beat well until slightly fluffy. Scrape the sides of the bowl well. Add the eggs one at a time, beating until blended before adding the next. With the mixer on low, add the flour, vanilla, and lemon zest, and mix until almost incorporated but not quite. Switch from the mixer to a stiff rubber spatula and mix just until the batter is well blended and smooth, taking care to scrape the bowl's bottom and sides. Gently fold in the berries.

Scrape the batter into the loaf pan and bake in the middle of the oven until the cake is golden brown and a toothpick comes out with just a few crumbs clinging to it when inserted in the center, 60 to 65 min. if using fresh berries, 75 to 90 min. if using frozen. Let the cake cool for about 15 min. and then invert the pan and lightly tap it to release the cake. Cool completely on a rack before serving.

*Carolyn Weil teaches and writes about baking and pastry in Berkeley, California. ♦*

### **Break out of the mold, beautifully.**

Instead of the traditional loaf pan, try a fluted bundt pan for a dressier presentation. The Sour Cream Pound Cake recipe is scaled for a 10- to 12-cup bundt pan; the other recipes can be doubled to fit.







It's interesting how the people who are passionate about a craft all tend to have one thing in common: The Taunton Press.



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## Canola or corn? Choosing a vegetable oil

These days, our market shelves groan with more and more choices of vegetable oils—each shouting its own health claim. How do we know which are best for cooking? It helps to understand that “vegetable oil” is a broad term for a category of oils pressed from the seeds, nuts, grains, or fruits of plants. With the exception of specialty oils (such as toasted sesame or nut oils), vegetable oils are refined and filtered to create clear, relatively neutral-tasting oils to be used for cooking, frying, and baking. When choosing an oil for dressings, marinades, and baking, the only real criteria are taste and health preferences. For sautéing and frying, however, you’ll do best using an oil with a high smoke point. When a recipe simply calls for vegetable oil, you don’t need to rush out and buy a bottle labeled “vegetable oil”; rather, you can use any of the oils from the following list, keeping in mind the slight flavor differences.

**Corn oil:** This dark yellow oil has long been the most common vegetable oil in the United States, simply because it’s so abundant. Many chefs like its mild, almost buttery flavor for mayonnaise and



baking (think cornbread). It’s a favorite for pan-frying because of the distinct roasty flavor it lends to foods.

**Canola oil:** Processed from the rapeseed plant, a seed plant related to mustard, this light, mild-tasting oil has gained popularity because it’s rated second only to olive oil in the amount of monounsaturated fat.

**Peanut oil:** Not to be confused with unrefined peanut oil, which carries the full flavor of peanuts, most grocery-store peanut oil is mild and light. Its primary use is dressings, dipping sauces, and frying. Be aware that people with severe peanut allergies may not be able to eat foods cooked with peanut oil.

**Soybean oil:** This neutral, stable workhorse oil is found mainly under the generic vegetable oil label. It has little flavor and is intended for all uses—although

some chefs complain of an off taste when heated too high.

**Safflower oil:** This light, almost tasteless oil is a good all-purpose oil for instances when you simply want the properties of the oil without any pronounced flavor.

**Sunflower oil:** A pale, bland-tasting oil very similar to safflower oil but somewhat less widely available.

**Vegetable oil:** Examine the labels on these popular, all-purpose oils and you’ll find an ingredient list that tells you exactly what it contains. Buy only those brands that list pure oil (any oil labeled “pure” will contain only oil and no flavorings or stabilizers). Typically, generic vegetable oils are soybean oil (see left) or some type of blend. Most have a very high smoke point, making them good for frying.

**Oils high in monounsaturated fat:** Canola, peanut.

**Oils high in polyunsaturated fat:** Corn, sunflower, safflower, soybean.

**Best oils for serious frying:** Peanut, corn, safflower.

## How to tell when fish is fully cooked

One of the first cookbooks I ever owned was *James Beard’s Fish Cookery*, and I was forever impressed with one bit of general advice offered in the introduction: “Don’t overcook fish.” As a young cook, I remember taking this advice to heart but being frustrated because I didn’t know how to tell when fish was done.

After subsequent years of cooking fish and learning from many great chefs, I’ve devised a few simple tricks so that I can now be sure to follow Beard’s advice. The often-quoted theory of cooking fish for 10 minutes per inch of thickness may be a good guideline, but in reality 8 minutes is a better timeframe in



Photo: Scott Phillips



which to at least start checking for doneness.

Fish will continue to cook for a minute or two off the heat. Be sure to stop cooking when the fish is just shy of done; otherwise, it will overcook by the time you serve it.

Use the tip of a small knife to peek at the interior of the fish. Many cookbooks tell you to cook fish until it flakes; this is too long. Once it flakes, the fish has lost too much moisture and will be dry and bland. As you peek, see

how easily the fish gives way. It should gently resist flaking but show signs of firming. If the fish is on the bone, the flesh should lightly resist pulling away from the bone.

Raw fish has a translucent appearance that turns opaque during cooking. Most types of fish are considered done when they're just opaque throughout. Many people, however, enjoy some types of fatty fish, such as tuna and salmon, a little less done. These should be opaque on

the outside but still translucent at the center.

For thin fillets, like sole and flounder, skip the knife test. These cook so quickly that the inside will be done by the time the outside turns opaque. Since sole fillets are often thick in the center and thin on the ends, I like to tuck the thin tail under the thicker part to create an evenly thick fillet that will cook uniformly.

Use an instant-read thermometer to check whole fish or large steaks. Fish is done

when it reaches 135° to 140°F (if you prefer tuna and salmon a little less done, look for 120° to 125°F). An old chef's trick to judge the internal temperature of a large cut of fish is to insert the tip of the knife into the thickest part of the fish for a few seconds and then to touch the knife to the inside of your lip. If the knife feels warm, the inside of the fish will be cooked through.

---

*Molly Stevens is a contributing editor to Fine Cooking.* ♦

## Sautéing vs. pan-frying

When you cook food in a skillet in some amount of fat, you're either sautéing or pan-frying. Which one you're doing depends on just a few subtle differences:



### To sauté:

- ◆ Use only the smallest amount of fat or oil—enough to lightly coat the bottom of the pan and prevent the food from sticking.
- ◆ Use medium-high to high heat—hot enough to make the food sizzle, sputter, and even jump a little the instant it hits the pan.
- ◆ Keep the food in nearly constant motion, by stirring with a utensil or actually flipping the pan, so that it browns evenly.
- ◆ Choose fast-cooking foods: cutlets, vegetable pieces, shrimp.
- ◆ Use fats such as clarified butter, vegetable oil, or a mix of whole butter and oil.



### To pan-fry:

- ◆ Use about ¼ inch of fat or oil.
- ◆ Use medium to medium-high heat.
- ◆ Leave the food relatively undisturbed—except for an occasional flip or turn with a spatula, a fork, or tongs.
- ◆ Choose larger pieces of food and those that are coated with breading before cooking, such as thick pork chops, bone-in chicken pieces, and whole trout.
- ◆ Use fats with a high smoke point, like vegetable oil or lard—a very traditional fat for pan-frying.

# Getting fried potatoes to be crisp and light



**Why make french fries long and thin?** To maximize their surface area, which means faster cooking and more of those sweet, crisp, browning compounds.

**F**rying potatoes: how complicated can it be? You take a potato, slice it into strips, fry until crisp and golden, drain, and serve. Nothing to it, right?

Actually, there is quite a lot to it. Yes, making great fries is easy once you have a good recipe in hand (Michael Yeaman's article on p. 65 supplies that), but there's a lot of unseen action driving this seemingly straightforward process, and knowing what's happening can help you get potatoes that are crisp and light, not limp and soggy. It starts with choosing the right potato.

## Choose high-starch potatoes for frying

Probably the biggest factor to consider when picking a potato is its starch content, which is a good indicator of how it will cook. High-starch potatoes have, as you would guess, more starch than some varieties and a little less water. This combination makes them perfect for very crisp fries (as well as for dry, fluffy baked potatoes). Low-starch potatoes, on the other hand, have less starch and more moisture. They're great for boiling, but they make limp, soggy fries.

**High-starch Russet Burbanks are especially good for frying.** Not only are they packed with starch granules, but the granules are larger than in other varieties. Russet Burbanks (also called Idahoes or simply russets) absorb less fat, cook in less time, and make lighter, crisper fries that are less prone to being limp or greasy.

When potato strips are dropped into hot oil, the sudden high heat turns moisture near the potatoes' surface into steam, which pushes outward,

causing bubbles and that familiar sizzle. Water in the center of the potato rushes out to the surface to replace what has been lost. This steam does two things. It gets rid of most of the free internal moisture and allows only a small amount of oil to be absorbed on and near the surface. As long as there's pressure from steam pushing outward, the oil can't enter the potatoes.

As frying continues (or during the high-temperature second frying—a technique I'll discuss in a moment), something different happens with the water. Starch granules on the surface absorb the surface moisture and expand. With this swelling, the surface seals so oil cannot enter, and any remaining moisture gets trapped inside. Russet Burbank potatoes, with their large starch granules, can absorb all of that trapped internal water to produce a crisp fry with a dry interior.

In contrast, fries made with lower-starch/higher-moisture potatoes get brown before they lose all their moisture. They tend to turn limp after standing a short time because of the steam trapped under the surface. These principles apply not just to deep-frying, but to pan-frying as well.

## Cold storage turns high-starch potatoes into low

The ideal storage condition for potatoes is a cool (45° to 55°F), dark place. If potatoes are held below 40°F, some of the starch breaks down into sugars. If you fry these potatoes, the increase in sugar causes them to brown too fast, before they cook through in the center. Fortunately, storing the potatoes in a warmer place



for a few days will revert the sugars to starch.

### **Long and skinny fries cook faster**

Fried potatoes come in many shapes and sizes, but the classic long, thin french fry is an ideal shape because it has so much surface area. This means faster cooking time, rapid moisture loss for crisp fries, more exterior for those sweet, crisp, great-tasting browning compounds to form, and, admittedly, a larger area that can absorb oil.

### **If you rinse or soak in water, be sure to dry well**

There is some controversy over whether rinsing potatoes makes a difference. Rinsing re-

moves the starch on the potato's surface; these surface starches can cover the natural sugars and proteins that cause browning, so it's possible that rinsing enhances browning.

Drying the potatoes after rinsing is crucial. Water on the potatoes' surface causes the temperature of the cooking oil to drop. This means a longer cooking time and more fat absorption. Water also reacts with the cooking oil, forming contaminants that lower the oil's smoke point.

Perhaps most important, water on the surface can inhibit crispness and produce greasy fries. Remember that the surface starch absorbs nearby moisture and seals the

greatly reduces their internal moisture, drying them out. The second fry at a higher temperature browns and crisps the fries. Ideally, this is when the surface starch absorbs the last remaining bit of moisture, expands more, and seals the surface for crispness.

You do need to have the cooking time for high-starch potatoes just right. If you cook them too long, they'll run out of internal moisture. Without this moisture to turn to steam pushing outward, the fries become greasy.

---

*Food scientist Shirley Corriher of Atlanta is the author of CookWise (Morrow) and a contributing editor to Fine Cooking. ♦*

## **As long as you hear that sizzling, the oil isn't getting in.**

surface. If you don't dry the potatoes, you won't get a dry surface that seals.

### **For crisp, firm fries, fry twice**

Double frying can ensure outstanding fries. The first fry at a lower temperature cooks the potatoes through and

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successful Personal chef by enrolling in the United States Personal Chef Institute. Upon completion of the USPCI's Undergraduate Program you'll earn a Personal Chef Diploma and start an exciting new career as Personal Chef. *For more information, call the United States Personal Chef Institute at 1-800-995-2138 or go to <http://www.uspci.com>. Training and resources available for all experience levels.*



READER SERVICE NO. 113

# The quiet strength of thyme

When I think of thyme, I'm reminded of a sustained bass note in a symphony. I may not be conscious of which note is being played, but I am aware that something is underpinning all the other melodies and notes in the symphony. Similarly, thyme buttresses and balances other flavors in a dish. Top notes like parsley, onion, garlic, and ginger taste less complex without the minty warmth that thyme contributes to the overall flavor.

Unlike rosemary, which tends to dominate other flavors in a dish, thyme shares the spotlight with other herbs graciously, perfuming foods with its warm, aromatic flavor. A few finely chopped leaves added at the last minute bring the other flavors into sharper focus. Because it's equally at home in a caramel sauce served over roasted fruits as it is in baked macaroni and cheese, thyme has a prominent place in my herb garden and spice cabinet.

## Many varieties

Native to southern Europe and the Mediterranean area, *Thymus vulgaris* is a perennial shrub belonging to the *Labiatae*, or mint, family. For the broadest culinary use, French thyme (also called summer thyme) and English thyme are the two to look for at your local market, but there are many other variants.

Lemon thyme is a friend of seafood dishes, particularly whole fish poached in an aromatic broth. It's also wonderful with roasted vegetables

like beets, carrots, and fennel. Other variants include a pine-scented thyme native to northern Africa, one from the Azores with the aroma of tangerine, a caraway-scented variety, and even one that mimics oregano.

**Rinse fresh thyme well before using.** Pat it dry and then pick the leaves from the stem if you'll be chopping the thyme (the stems are tough and you don't want to eat them). Some thyme varieties can be tedious to pick, but English thyme, with its wiry stems, is quite easy: Pinch the top of a sprig between thumb and forefinger. Zip your other thumb and forefinger down the stem, pulling off the leaves as you go.

Like any other herb, fresh and dried thyme are not the



same thing. But in this case, the dried version has its charms, particularly in a stuffing for poultry. A good rule to follow: Substitute about one teaspoon of the dried for about a tablespoon of the fresh.

## Use an infusion to capture flavor

Thyme doesn't always have to be permanently added to a dish to impart its flavor. A *bouquet garni* is a case in point. This classical flavoring for stocks, soups, and sauces con-

sists of thyme, bay leaf, peppercorns, and parsley tied into a cheesecloth pouch. The *bouquet garni* is simmered until it releases its flavors into the liquid. Then it's discarded, allowing just the essence of its ingredients to remain.

High-quality olive oil and vinegar are perfect vehicles for thyme's pleasantly insistent flavor. Add the herb to the olive oil and heat it to 220°F. Keep the temperature between 220° and 250°F for 20 minutes, and then remove it from the heat and let it steep until cool. Bottle the infused oil and store it in the refrigerator. (For more information on making infused oils, see *Fine Cooking* #12, p. 40.) Mild vinegars, such as white balsamic, Champagne, and white wine, also marry well with a few sprigs of fresh thyme. Simply simmer the vinegar with the herb and perhaps strips of orange zest for a few minutes. Strain out the solids, cover tightly and store in a cool, dark place. Use the infused oil or vinegar in place of plain oil or vinegar whenever you feel the need for that bass note of thyme.

## Experiment with thyme

- ◆ Roast a pork loin with tart apples and root vegetables. Deglaze the pan with thyme-infused white balsamic vinegar and then mellow the pan sauce with a bit of mild honey.
- ◆ Stuff a chicken with a bunch of fresh thyme and a halved lemon before roasting.
- ◆ Flavor a leek quiche or scrambled eggs with thyme.
- ◆ Add a sprig of thyme to a pot of rice pilaf.
- ◆ Drizzle thyme-infused olive oil into a legume-based soup, like minestrone or lentil, or use it as the base for a vinaigrette.
- ◆ Poach white fish fillets in a thyme-scented broth.
- ◆ Stuff a whole fish, like sea bass or turbot, with a mixture of caramelized onions and finely chopped thyme and then grill.
- ◆ Marinate a beef filet or leg of lamb overnight in a mixture of dry red wine, fruity olive oil, crushed sprigs of English thyme, salt, and coarsely ground black pepper. Drain and dry the meat before roasting, and sprinkle with more chopped fresh thyme during roasting.
- ◆ Use a syrup scented with lemon thyme to poach fruits or to flavor pound cake or shortbread.

Robert Wemischner is the co-author with Diana Rosen of *Cooking with Tea* (Periplus Editions). ◆



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## Appetizer Menu

Rice paper rounds, wasabi powder, tamarind concentrate, and water chestnut powder are all sold in Asian food markets. Tamarind concentrate can also be found at Mexican and Indian



markets. Many of these ingredients can also be ordered by mail from **Adriana's Caravan** (800/316-0820), **Seema Enterprises** (800/557-3362), or **Kalustyan's** (212/685-3451).

## Lace Cookies

Look for reusable nonstick pan liners at your local kitchen store. **Williams-Sonoma** (800/541-2233; williams-sonoma.com) carries the Silpat liner (about \$26). **King Arthur Flour** (800/827-6836; kingarthurfour.com) carries a brand by the name of Cook-Eze (\$19.85 for two).

## Spatulas

The spatulas on pp. 68–69 are as follows (prices approximate). Page 68, top to bottom: Lamson Sharp slotted turner (\$20); Wüsthof 4½-inch slotted palette turner (\$29); Oxo Steel pie server (\$8); Berndes nylon spatula (\$5). Page 69, top to bottom: Williams-Sonoma 2x2-inch brownie spatula (\$10); Lamson Sharp 2½x2½-inch server/turner (\$14); Oxo Steel lasagna turner (\$8);

Williams-Sonoma 8x3-inch spatula (\$25).

For information on the product lines, contact:

**Lamson & Goodnow**, 800/872-6564, lamsonsharp.com; **Oxo**, 800/545-4411, oxo.com; **Williams-Sonoma** (see left); **Berndes**, 888/266-5983, berndes.com; **Wüsthof** (spatulas available from A Cook's Wares, see below).

To buy spatulas, check these sources: **Professional Cutlery Direct** (800/859-6994, cutlery.com) has a large selection of Lamson Sharp spatulas; **Cooking.com** has a large selection of Oxo Steel tools; **A Cook's Wares** (800/915-9788, cookwares.com) carries Wüsthof and other

brands; **Bed, Bath & Beyond** carries Oxo and other brands (order from bedbathandbeyond.com, or call 800/462-3966 for a store near you).

## Artisan Foods

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## NUTRITION INFORMATION

Recipe (analysis per serving)	Page	Calories		Protein (g)	Carb (g)	Fats (g)				Chol (mg)	Sodium (mg)	Fiber (g)	Notes
		total	from fat			total	sat	mono	poly				
Fresh Pea Soup	12	230	70	11	28	8	5	2	1	20	640	9	per serving
Classic Meat Lasagna	36	920	460	63	57	51	24	20	5	170	1,480	7	per serving
Sicilian Vegetable Lasagna	38	680	280	41	65	31	14	13	4	50	1,500	13	per serving
Slow-Sautéed Carrots & Turnips	43	180	90	3	22	10	3	5	1	10	380	5	per serving
Slow-Sautéed Asparagus w/Pancetta	43	110	60	7	10	6	2	3	1	10	450	4	per serving
Slow-Sautéed Broccoli w/Parmesan	43	260	200	8	11	22	4	15	2	5	330	6	per serving
Slow-Sautéed Artichokes	44	170	90	5	18	10	1	7	1	0	440	9	per serving
Slow-Sautéed String Beans	44	170	120	2	11	14	2	10	1	0	300	4	per serving (w/o ham)
Classic Sole Meunière	47	440	260	34	9	29	14	9	4	165	200	0	per serving
Classic Lace Cookies	56	40	20	0	4	2.5	1	1	0.5	5	10	0	per cookie
Cinnamon Currant Lace Cookies	56	50	20	1	8	2	1.5	0.5	0	5	15	0	per cookie
Milk-Chocolate Lace Cookie Sandwiches	57	160	100	2	14	11	4	5	2	10	30	1	per sandwich cookie
Golden Chicken Broth	52	20	5	2	0	0.5	0	0	0	0	330	0	per cup
Matzo Ball Soup	52	240	120	10	21	13	4	5	2	150	690	1	per serving
Chicken Noodle Soup w/Carrots & Peas	53	310	40	38	28	4	1	1	1	90	1,030	5	per serving
Chicken Soup w/Rice, Lemon & Mint	53	180	20	20	21	2	0.5	0.5	0.5	35	970	1	per serving
French Fries	67	530	310	9	60	34	6	16	11	0	290	7	per 1/4 recipe
Shanghai Scallion Pancakes	61	430	210	8	50	23	4	10	8	0	490	3	per pancake
Seared Tuna Tostados	61	100	40	6	8	4.5	1.5	2	0.5	15	180	1	per, w/2 Tbs. salsa
Fresh Shrimp Spring Rolls	62	80	20	3	11	2	0.5	1	0.5	15	190	1	per roll w/1 Tbs. sauce
Crunchy Chicken Drumettes	63	200	130	10	7	14	3	7	4	45	210	1	per drumette
Meatballs in Peanut Curry Sauce	64	50	30	3	3	3.5	2	1	0.5	5	110	0	per meatball
Sour Cream Pound Cake	74	560	230	7	76	26	15	8	1	165	210	1	per slice (1/10 cake)
Lemon Buttermilk Pound Cake	74	260	90	4	38	11	6	3	1	70	170	1	per slice (1/10 loaf)
Cream Cheese & Blueberry Pound Cake	75	340	130	5	47	14	8	4	1	120	180	1	per slice (1/10 loaf)
Seared Scallop Salad	90	650	400	34	31	44	10	27	4	80	760	5	per serving

The nutritional analyses have been calculated by a registered dietitian at The Food Consulting Company of San Diego, California. When a recipe gives a choice of ingredients, the first choice is the one used in

the calculations. Optional ingredients and those listed without a specific quantity are not included. When a range of ingredient amounts or servings is given, the smaller amount or portion is used.



## Turn a salad into a satisfying meal

To me, a simple composed salad is a quick but somehow elegant supper.

I always start with a bed of greens. On top of that goes raw or cooked vegetables and hot, sautéed, crispy little pieces of fish or meat. (I'll have tossed the greens with a slightly pungent vinaigrette to balance the richness of the meat or fish.) Finally, I pull the flavors together with a flourish or two: capers, anchovies, fresh herbs, a few sun-dried tomatoes, or olives. The whole thing usually comes together in under 15 minutes.

The recipe here calls for pan-seared sea scallops, but I use the same quick cooking technique for all kinds of ingredients: quickly searing the meat or fish on very high heat so the outside browns and the inside remains juicy. I then deglaze the pan with wine or Cognac so I can retrieve all the flavors left there.

Any salad green can be a good base. I particularly like greens with a slightly bitter edge, such as arugula, radicchio, endive, watercress, frisée, escarole, dandelion, or a mix of several. These greens also don't wilt as fast as more delicate lettuces when tossed with something hot.

Try not to add too many ingredients. The salad should be streamlined, including just a few complementary ingredients, not a catch-all to clean out your refrigerator.

Here are a few specific combinations I've found particularly delicious:

◆ Sautéed chicken livers (deglazed with Cognac) on escarole, with boiled new potatoes, blanched string beans, and walnuts, with a walnut oil and sherry vinegar dressing.

◆ Skirt steak, pan-seared and sliced, on chicory, with crumbled Gorgonzola, red onion, and beefsteak tomato wedges, dressed with olive oil, red-wine vinegar, and a touch of garlic.

◆ Sautéed chanterelles or morels on frisée, with string beans, julienned prosciutto, and croutons, tossed with a shallot vinaigrette.

◆ Pan-seared slices of garlic sausage on romaine lettuce, with roasted red pepper strips and bits of soft goat cheese, tossed with a basil and lemon dressing.

*Erica De Mane is a chef, a teacher, and the author of *Pasta Improvvisata: How to Improvise in Classic Italian Style* (Scribner). ◆*

### Seared Scallop Salad

For best results, look for "dry" scallops, not ones marked "water added," and remove the tough tabs of muscle with your fingers. A couple of minced anchovies and a tablespoon of rinsed capers would give the salad a briny touch. *Serves two as a main course.*

- 1 lemon**
- 1 tsp. Dijon mustard**
- 1 Tbs. heavy cream**
- 3 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil**
- Pinch sugar**
- Coarse salt (preferably sea salt) and freshly ground black pepper**
- 5 small new potatoes, boiled until tender, cut in half or quarters if large, and kept warm**
- $\frac{3}{4}$  lb. large sea scallops, patted dry**
- 2 Tbs. olive oil**
- 1 Tbs. unsalted butter**
- $\frac{1}{4}$  cup dry white wine or vermouth**
- 5 cups mesclun or 2 large bunches watercress, trimmed, rinsed, and dried**
- 1 Tbs. finely chopped fresh chives**

Grate the zest from the lemon, reserve it, and squeeze the juice from half the lemon into a large bowl. Add the mustard and cream, whisking to blend. Slowly add the extra-virgin olive oil, whisking until thickened. Season with the sugar, salt, and pepper. Add the cooked potatoes and toss to coat.

Season the scallops with salt and pepper. Heat a heavy-based skillet on high and add the olive oil. When the oil is very hot, add the butter. Add the scallops, leaving a bit of space between them. Sear them without moving them around. When they're well browned at the bottom edges (after about 2 min.), turn and brown the other side, about 1 min. or so more. Remove the scallops from the pan and pour off the fat. Put the pan back over medium heat. Add the lemon zest and wine or vermouth to deglaze, scraping up any bits stuck to the bottom. Cook until the wine is reduced to a syrupy glaze. Remove from the heat.

Add the mesclun to the warm potatoes and dressing and toss to coat the greens. Divide the salad between two dinner plates.

Arrange the scallops on the greens. Pour the glaze from the pan over the scallops and garnish with the chives. Serve right away, with a warm baguette and a glass of cold rosé.

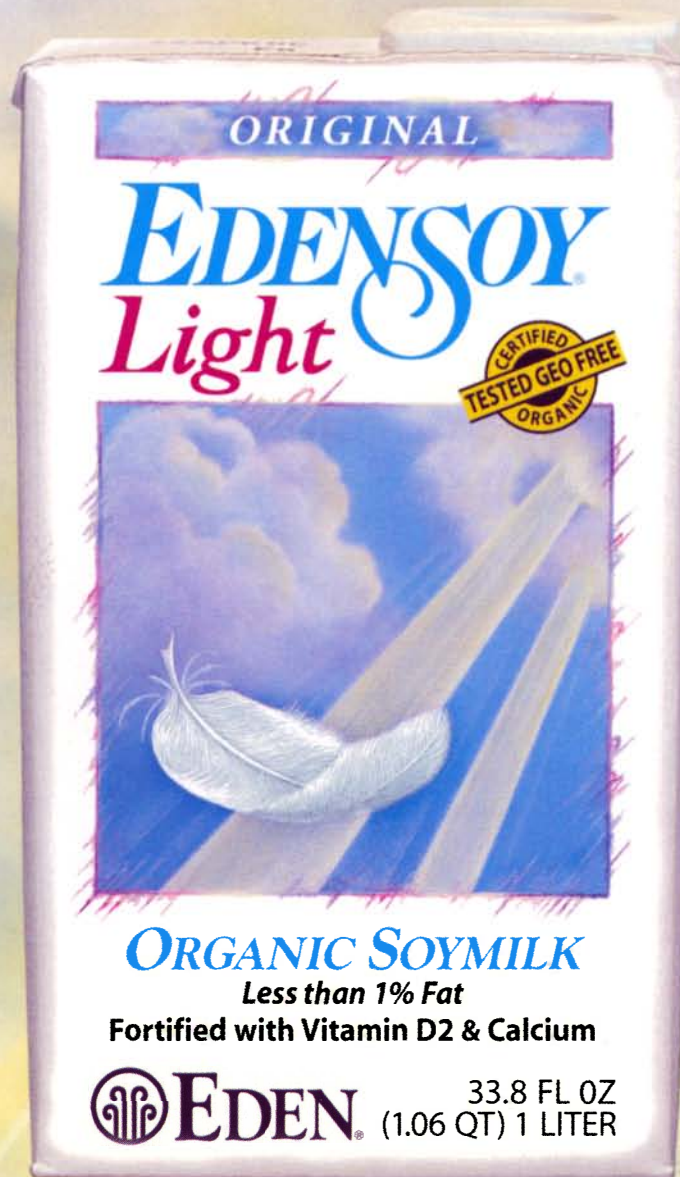


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**Miso begins with cultured grain, called koji.** Organic grains like brown rice, barley, or millet are steamed, inoculated with a mold, loaded into a large wooden “crib,” and then stirred to prevent overheating.

# The Ancient Art of Making Miso, Practiced in New England

An internship in 1978 with a Japanese master teacher inspired Christian and Gaella Elwell to buy land in rural Massachusetts and make miso their life’s work. “In Japan, miso made in the centuries-old farmhouse tradition is called *inaka* miso,” Christian says. “If we were going to be so bold as to make miso in New England, we wanted to do it in the *inaka* tradition.”

They founded South River Miso Company in 1981, and today, staying true to their original mission, they make 5,000 pounds of miso per month, almost entirely unaided by electricity or machines. They boil organic soy or other beans in a wood-fired cauldron for twenty hours, mash the beans gently underfoot like wine grapes, and mix them with fragrant cultured grain, called koji. The raw miso is put into massive outdoor cypress vats, where it “gathers time,” transforming with the seasons into a rich, savory, nourishing, and surprisingly versatile ingredient. Customers use the hand-crafted miso in sauces, salad dressings, and, of course, as the foundation for delicious soups. And like the Japanese, Christian reveres miso as an energizing, healing food.



**Keeping with tradition, Christian blends the koji with cooked soybeans by treading,** which produces a chunky mash of raw miso. “It’s like a massage for the beans,” says Christian. (The treader wears two pairs of organic cotton socks and plastic foot coverings.)



Photos: below right, Sarah Jay; all others, Sarah Chester.

**The koji is divided into wooden trays and set in a warm, moist room for two days.** The humidity is regulated with damp cloths and by splashing water on the floor. When the koji is covered with white mold, it’s ready to be harvested and mixed with sun-dried Baja California sea salt.

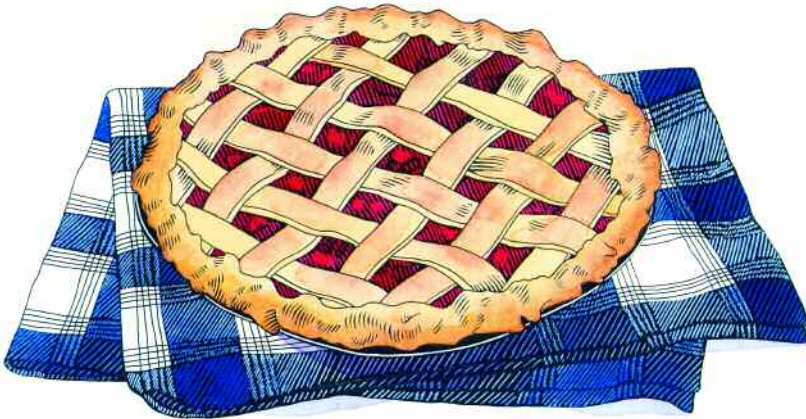


**As it ages, miso’s character evolves** from mild and almost sweet to darker, saltier, and deeper in flavor.



# fine COOKING Pie & Tart Guide

PRODUCED BY ABIGAIL JOHNSON DODGE



**A**t *Fine Cooking*, we hear a lot from readers on the lookout for dependable techniques for pies and tarts. So we've put together this guide, with methods for handling pie dough, mastering fillings, and making flaky puff pastry—along with many other keys to pie and tart expertise.

## Flat fruit tarts

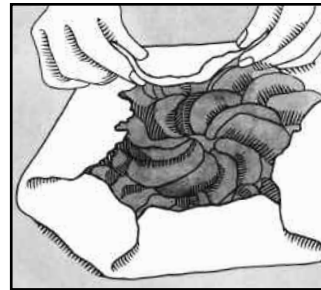
Roll Rough Puff Pastry into two 10-inch rounds or 10x8-inch rectangles a scant  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch thick; trim any excess. Transfer to a baking sheet lined with parchment. Prick thoroughly with fork tines.

**TO TOP WITH FRESH FRUIT:** Bake at 375°F until golden brown, about 20 min. Cool completely. Spread about  $\frac{1}{3}$  cup fruit preserves on each crust and top with berries, sliced peaches, or other fruit.

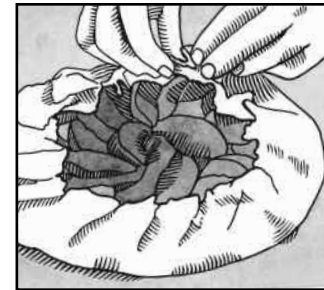
**TO BAKE WITH FRUIT ON TOP:** Arrange thinly sliced apples, pears, or stone fruit on top of the dough, leaving a 1-inch border. Sprinkle on a mix of sugar and spices; dot with a little butter. Bake at 375°F until the crust is golden brown and the fruit is tender, about 30 min.

## Three ways to pleat a galette

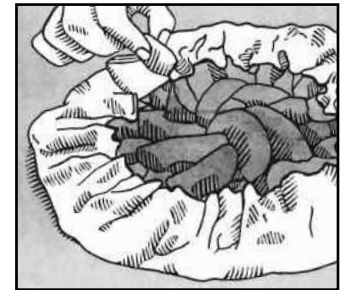
Roll Pâte Brisée into a 14-inch round that's  $\frac{3}{16}$  inch thick (trim the edges if necessary). Transfer to a parchment-lined baking sheet. Arrange fresh fruit in the center, leaving a 2-inch border. Lift the edges of the dough and fold them in over the filling. Work around the tart, using one of these pleating options. After pleating, brush the edge with melted butter, sprinkle with sugar, and bake the galette.



**For a quick finish and a geometric look, fold large sections of dough, overlapping slightly; this will give you a hexagon or heptagon with straight sides.**



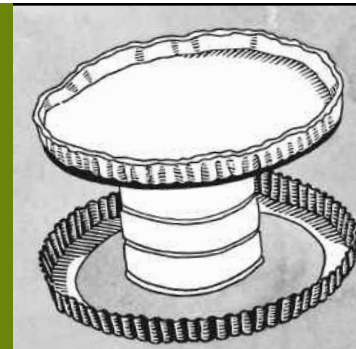
**For a more uniform result, pleat in one direction, folding the dough onto itself in regularly spaced pleats.**



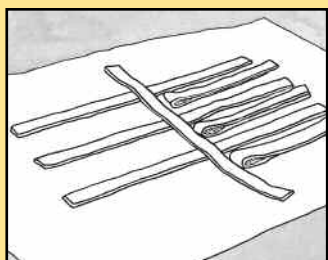
**For a pulled-purse effect, crimp as you fold the excess up and away from the filling.**

## Removing a tart ring

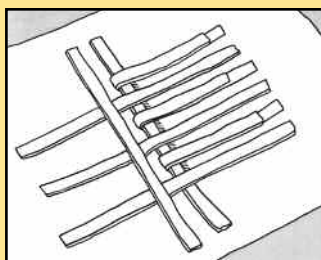
Set the cooled tart pan on a wide, solid base that's at least 3 inches high—a coffee can is great. The outer side ring will slip away from the crust. To remove the bottom, set the tart on a flat surface and carefully slide a long, thin metal spatula (an offset one works best) between the shell and the pan bottom.



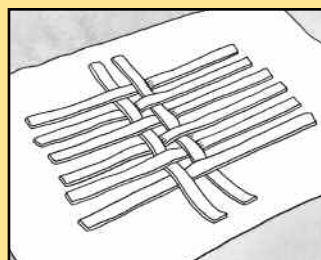
## Assemble a “pre-fab” lattice crust on a parchment-lined baking sheet



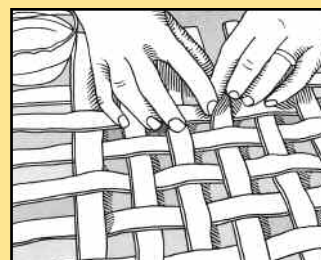
**1** Roll Classic Pie Dough out to 14x9 inches; cut it into twelve 14x $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch strips. Lay six horizontal strips  $\frac{3}{4}$  inch apart on a lined baking sheet, folding back every other. Lay another strip vertically, just right of center.



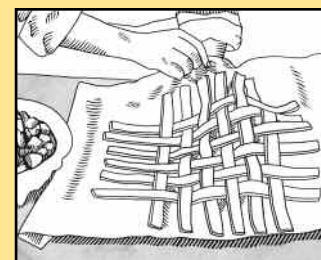
**2** Unfold the folded strips and fold back the other three strips. Lay a second vertical strip  $\frac{3}{4}$  inch to the left of the first.



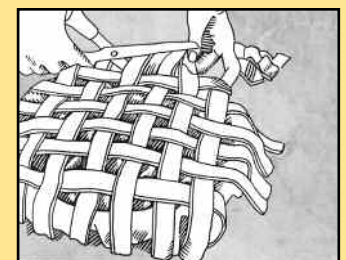
**3** Unfold the folded strips. Now fold back alternating strips from the right, starting at the top. Lay a strip  $\frac{3}{4}$  inch to the right of the center strip; unfold the folded strips. Repeat with the rest of the strips.



**4** Dab a little water where the strips overlap; press gently to seal. Cover loosely with plastic and transfer the baking sheet to the refrigerator for 20 min. Line your pie pan with the bottom crust and your filling.



**5** To top the pie, put your palm under the parchment at the lattice's center. Lift the paper and quickly invert the lattice onto the filled pie.



**6** Trim the crust, leaving a  $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch overhang. Press the edges into the bottom crust's overhang, fold them under, pinch-crimp (see far left) and bake.

## Blind baking pastry shells

Follow the steps for lining the pan (over). Freeze the crust for at least 30 min. Heat the oven to 425°F. Line the frozen crust with a large piece of foil, fill with pie weights, dried beans, or rice, and bake until set, about 12 min. Remove the foil and weights; continue baking until golden brown, about another 8 min., checking for bubbles (push them down gently with the back of a spoon). Fill the baked shell according to your recipe.

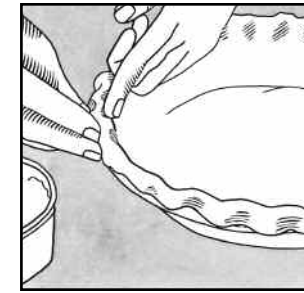
## Making a double-crust pie

Line the pan as for a one-crust pie (over), leaving the excess hanging over the side. Cover loosely with plastic while you roll out the other disk of dough. Pile the filling into the shell. Brush the rim of the bottom crust

with water. Gently wrap the top crust around the rolling pin and position it over the pie; unroll, centering it over the filling. Press the edges together. Trim both crusts with scissors, leaving a ½-inch overhang. Tuck the

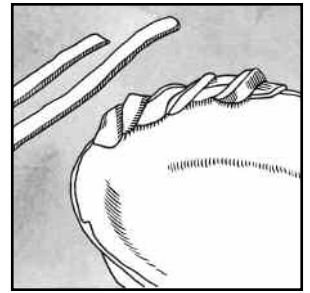
overhang under to shape a high-edge crust that rests on top of the pan's edge and pinch-crimp (see right). Slash two or three vent holes in the top crust with a paring knife and then bake according to your recipe.

## Decorative edges



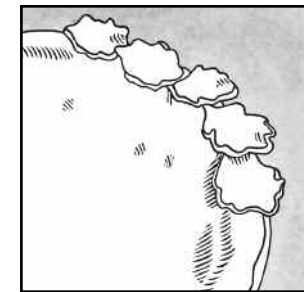
### Pinch-crimp

Press toward the center of the pie with the thumb and index finger of one hand. At the same time, press toward the edge of the other hand. Proceed around the entire edge of the crust.



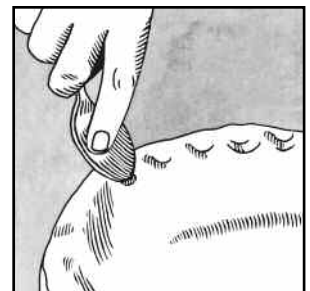
### Twisted ribbon

Trim the dough to fit directly on the rim, with no overhang. Gather the scraps, roll them ⅜ inch thick, and cut long strips about ½ inch wide. Working with two strips at a time, twist them around each other and fuse the ends together. Repeat with the remaining strips. Lightly coat the dough rim with egg wash and arrange each twisted cord on the rim, pressing gently to secure. Lightly brush with more egg wash.



### Leaves

Trim the dough to ½ inch beyond the pan's edge. Roll the scraps ⅜ inch thick. With a small, 1- to 1½-inch cookie cutter, stamp out leaves (or other shapes); cover with plastic and set aside. Fold the trimmed pie dough neatly under itself to create a flat rim around the edge of the pan. Lightly brush the dough rim with egg wash and arrange the cutouts on the rim (they can be as aligned or as jaunty as you like), pressing gently to affix. Lightly brush each cutout with more egg wash.



### Spoon imprint

Trim the dough to ½ inch beyond the pan's edge. Fold the excess under itself to create a flat rim. Gently but firmly press the front tip of an overturned spoon into the dough to make a "U." Pull the spoon up and print another "U" inside the first one. Repeat around the rim.

## Fruit fillings

### Apple or Pear Pie Filling

A classic filling for a crumb-topped or double-crust American pie

Use ripe pears that are still firm, apples—I especially like Golden Delicious—or a mix. Set a foil-lined rimmed baking sheet on the lowest oven shelf to catch any fruit drippings as the pie bakes.

#### Apple or Pear Pie Filling

Yields enough to fill one 9-inch pie.

- 3 lb. apples or firm, ripe pears (or a mix), peeled, cored, and cut into ¾-inch chunks
- ⅔ cup packed dark brown sugar
- 3 Tbs. all-purpose flour
- 1 tsp. ground cinnamon
- 1 tsp. vanilla extract

¼ tsp. ground nutmeg  
Pinch salt

Toss all the ingredients together in a large bowl until well blended. Pile into an unbaked pie shell and top with a lattice, crumb, or solid top. Crimp as desired; brush with egg wash, if you like. Bake at 425°F for 15 min. Reduce the heat to 350°F and bake until the crust is golden and

the fruit is tender, about another 50 min.

Add or substitute one or two seasonings:

- ◆ 2 Tbs. apple cider
- ◆ 2 Tbs. brandy
- ◆ ¼ tsp. ground cloves
- ◆ ½ cup dried fruit
- ◆ 1 Tbs. fresh lemon juice
- ◆ 1 tsp. grated lemon zest
- ◆ ½ cup chopped toasted nuts

### Summer Fruit Tart or Galette Filling

A great filling for French-style, one-crust tarts or freeform galettes

Use for tarts and galettes, whose fillings are firmer and less juicy than American-style fruit pies. For deep, rich color, keep the skin on the fruit rather than peeling it.

#### Summer Fruit Tart or Galette Filling

Yields enough to fill one 9-inch tart or one 11-inch galette.

- 2 lb. stone fruit (plums, apricots, peaches, or nectarines), pitted and cut in ¾-inch wedges
- ½ cup sugar
- 3 Tbs. all-purpose flour
- 1 tsp. vanilla extract

½ tsp. grated lemon zest  
Pinch salt

Toss all the ingredients together in a large bowl until well blended. Pile into the center of a rolled-out pastry round or fill a dough-lined tart pan, arranging the fruit in a jumble or more formally, as you like. Crimp the tart or pleat the galette and brush with egg wash

or melted butter, if you like. Bake at 400°F until the crust is golden and the fruit is tender, 45 to 50 min.

Add or substitute one or two seasonings:

- ◆ ⅛ tsp. almond extract
- ◆ 1 Tbs. brandy
- ◆ ⅓ cup dried fruit
- ◆ 2 tsp. fresh lemon juice
- ◆ 1 tsp. grated orange zest
- ◆ 1 Tbs. orange juice

### Berry Pie Filling

A juicy fruit filling for an American-style berry pie

A perfect filling for crumb-topped pies, double-crust pies, or turnovers; use a mix of berries or just one type.

#### Berry Pie Filling

Yields enough to fill one 9-inch pie.

- 4 cups (about 2 lb.) raspberries, blackberries, or blueberries, picked over, rinsed, and dried well
- ½ to 1 cup sugar, depending on the sweetness of the fruit
- ¼ cup all-purpose flour

1 Tbs. fresh lemon juice  
Pinch ground nutmeg  
Pinch salt

Toss all the ingredients together in a large bowl until well blended. Pile into an unbaked pie shell and top with a lattice, crumb, or solid top. Crimp as desired and brush with egg wash, if you like. Bake at

425°F for 15 min. Reduce the heat to 350°F and bake until the crust is golden and the fruit is tender, about another 40 min.

Add or substitute one or two seasonings:

- ◆ ⅛ tsp. almond extract
- ◆ 1 Tbs. orange juice
- ◆ ½ tsp. vanilla extract



## Five versatile doughs

### American Pie Crust

**A supple, easy-to-handle dough for a flaky crust; perfect for traditional fruit pies**

Use this dough for double-crust and lattice topped pies like apple, pear, or berry, and for single-crust pies like pumpkin, lemon meringue, or a crumb-topped fruit pie. It keeps for up to two days in the refrigerator and up to two months in the freezer.

#### Classic Pie Dough

Yields enough for one 9-inch double-crust or lattice-topped pie or two one-crust pies.

**11¼ oz. (2½ cups) all-purpose flour**  
**1 Tbs. sugar**  
**½ tsp. salt**  
**4 oz. (8 Tbs.) cold unsalted butter, cut in ½-inch pieces**  
**¼ cup cold vegetable shortening, cut in ½-inch pieces**  
**¼ cup plus 2 Tbs. very cold water**  
**2 tsp. fresh lemon juice**

**In a food processor**—Put the flour, sugar, and salt in a food processor; pulse to combine. Add the butter and shortening; pulse just until coarse crumbs form, about 30 seconds. Add the water and lemon juice. Pulse just until moist crumbs form. Dump onto a work surface and gently shape into two 6-inch disks. Wrap in plastic; chill at least 1 hour before rolling.

**By hand**—In a large bowl, mix the flour, sugar, and salt.

With a pastry blender or your fingertips, blend in the butter and shortening until the mixture looks crumbly and resembles various-size peas. Add the water and lemon juice; mix with a wooden spoon or your fingertips until the dough is blended and just comes away from the sides of the bowl. You should see distinct flecks of butter. Dump onto a work surface; shape, wrap, and chill as with the food processor method.

### Pâte Brisée

**A buttery dough that's sturdy but tender, for lining quiches and other savory tarts**

Use this dough for French-style tarts and deep-dish quiches or tarts. It's great for galettes, too. It keeps for up to two days in the refrigerator and up to two months in the freezer.

#### Pâte Brisée

Yields enough for one 11-inch tart.

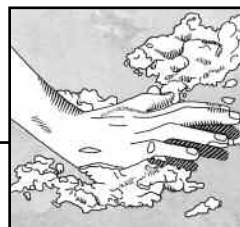
**6¾ oz. (1½ cups) all-purpose flour**  
**½ tsp. salt**  
**5 oz. (10 Tbs.) cold unsalted butter, cut in ½-inch pieces**  
**1 large egg yolk**  
**3 Tbs. chilled water**

**In a food processor**—Put the flour and salt in a food processor; pulse to combine. Add the butter; pulse just until coarse

crumbs form, about 30 seconds. Add the yolk and water. Pulse just until moist crumbs form. Dump the dough onto a work surface and blend using the *fraisage* technique below. Gently shape into a 6-inch disk. Wrap in plastic; chill at least 1 hour before rolling.

**By hand**—In a large bowl, mix the flour and salt. With a pastry blender or your fingertips, blend in the butter until the mixture

looks crumbly and resembles various-size peas. Add the yolk and water; mix with a wooden spoon or your fingertips until the dough is blended and just comes away from the sides of the bowl. You should see distinct flecks of butter. Dump onto a work surface and blend using the *fraisage* technique below; gather the dough, shape into a disk, wrap, and chill as with the food processor method.



**Fraisage blends the dough.** With the heel of your hand, smear small amounts of the dough by pushing away from you.

30 seconds. Add the egg and vanilla. Pulse just until moist crumbs form. Dump onto the work surface and blend using the *fraisage* technique at right. Gently shape into a 6-inch disk. Wrap in plastic; chill at least 1 hour before rolling.

**By hand**—In a large bowl, mix the flour, sugar, and salt. With a pastry blender or your fingertips, blend in the butter until the mixture looks crumbly

and resembles various-size peas. Add the egg and vanilla; mix with a wooden spoon or your fingertips until the dough is smooth and just comes away from the sides of the bowl. You should see distinct flecks of butter. Dump onto a work surface and blend using the *fraisage* technique above; gather the dough, shape into a disk, wrap, and chill as with the food processor method.

### Pâte Sucrée

**A sweet, cookie-like crust that's great for French-style tarts**

Use this dough for tarts made with fresh fruit, lemon curd, or frangipane, and for other French-style tarts that traditionally call for a sweet, tender, cookie-like crust. It keeps for up to two days in the refrigerator and up to two months in the freezer.

#### Pâte Sucrée

Yields enough for one 11-inch tart.

**6¾ oz. (1½ cups) all-purpose flour**  
**⅓ cup sugar**  
**¼ tsp. salt**  
**5 oz. (10 Tbs.) cold unsalted butter, cut in ½-inch pieces**  
**1 large egg**  
**1 tsp. vanilla extract**

**In a food processor**—Put the flour, sugar, and salt in a food processor; pulse to combine. Add the butter; pulse just until coarse crumbs form, about

**4 oz. (8 Tbs.) cold unsalted butter, cut into 8 pieces**  
**1 large cold egg, lightly beaten**

In the bowl of a stand mixer, mix the flours, sugar, ground almonds, baking powder, and salt. Add the butter and beat with the whisk attachment on low speed until most of the butter is pea-size, about 1½ min. The mixture will look

crumbly, and the crumbs will vary in size. Add the beaten egg and mix until the dough is smooth and just comes away from the sides of the bowl, about 30 seconds. You should see distinct flecks of butter. Dump onto a work surface and gently shape it into a 6-inch disk. Wrap in plastic; chill at least 1 hour before rolling.

### Buttery Tart Crust

**An easy-to-work alternative to pâte sucrée**

Use this dependable crust for fruit tarts in much the same way you would the *pâte sucrée* above. The dough gets mixed in a stand mixer instead of by hand. It keeps for up to two days in the refrigerator and up to two months in the freezer.

#### Buttery Tart Crust

Yields enough for one 11-inch tart.

**4½ oz. (1 cup) all-purpose flour**  
**1 oz. (¼ cup) cake flour**  
**2 oz. (⅔ cup) confectioners' sugar, sifted if lumpy**  
**3 Tbs. ground blanched almonds**  
**½ tsp. baking powder**  
**¼ tsp. salt**

## C fine COOKING Pie & Tart Guide

### Rolling out dough

**Roll between sheets of parchment or on a lightly dusted work surface**



**For extra-easy handling, roll in parchment:**

Between two large pieces of lightly floured parchment, roll the chilled dough to about ⅜ inch thick. Flip and turn the paper and dough several times as you roll, peeling back the paper on each turn and dusting the dough with flour to prevent sticking. Remove the top sheet of parchment. To transfer the dough to the pan, gently roll the dough around the rolling pin.



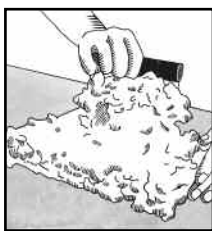
**On a countertop:**

Lightly dust the work surface and rolling pin with flour. Roll the chilled dough to about ⅜ inch thick. Give the dough quarter turns as you roll to prevent sticking, using a dough scraper or spatula to loosen it; dust the surface and rolling pin with flour as needed. To transfer the dough to the pan, gently roll it around the rolling pin.

# Rough Puff Pastry

**A shortcut method for buttery, flaky layers of delicate pastry**

Use this dough for turnovers, flat tarts, cheese straws, and as a topping for savory meat pies. Rough puff pastry involves less turns than traditional puff pastry, but you'll still get good, puffy layers. This recipe uses an additional shortcut called a "book turn," where you're doing two turns in one. Use a dough scraper to move the dough and square up the rectangle.



The dough will be shaggy for the first turn, but it will come together.

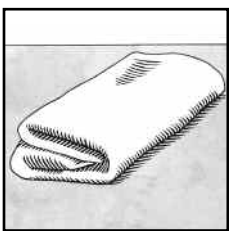
## Rough Puff Pastry

Yields enough for two 10x8-inch or 10-inch round flat tarts or to top four 5-inch pot pies.

**9 oz. (2 cups) all-purpose flour**  
**½ tsp. salt**  
**8 oz. (16 Tbs.) cold unsalted butter, cut into 1-inch pieces**  
**½ cup very cold water**



Roll it into a 6x18-inch rectangle for folding.



Fold the dough so the ends meet in the middle and then fold it in half.

In a large bowl or on a work surface, combine the flour and salt. Add the butter and toss to coat with flour. Using a pastry blender or two blunt table knives, cut the butter into the flour until the mixture is dry and rough with ½- to ¾-inch chunks of butter. Add the water and continue cutting until you get a shaggy dough that barely hangs together. Shape into a rectangle; roll into a 6x18-inch rectangle. The dough will still be ragged; this is okay. With a pastry scraper, fold both short ends toward each other so they

meet in the middle (you'll be pushing crumbs at first, but they will come together). Fold the top half over the lower half to make a 4x6-inch rectangle. Turn the dough so that the seam is on the right. Roll into a 6x18-inch rectangle and repeat the folding technique. Wrap in plastic; chill for 20 min. Position the dough so the seam is on the right. Roll into a 6x18-inch rectangle and fold the dough again as directed above, flouring lightly if needed. It should be smooth with a few small air bubbles and flecks of butter visible. Wrap in plastic and refrigerate until well chilled, about 2 hours or overnight. Freeze for up to two months.

## Fillings

### Frangipane Filling

**Use this almond cream as a thin layer or a full-on filling**

Bake a thin layer of frangipane on a tart shell before arranging fresh fruit on top, or use it as a tart filling in its own right, with brandy-soaked dried fruit pressed in.

#### Frangipane Filling

Yields enough to fill one 9-inch tart.

**4 oz. (about 2 cups) sliced almonds**  
**½ cup sugar**  
**2 large eggs**  
**4 oz. (8 Tbs.) unsalted butter, at room temperature**

**1½ tsp. dark rum**  
**¼ tsp. vanilla extract**  
**¼ tsp. almond extract**

In a food processor, pulse the almonds and sugar until they have a meal consistency. Add the remaining ingredients and process until creamy. Scrape into a blind-baked tart

shell and press in dried fruit, if using. Bake at 350°F until the top is golden and springs back, about 20 min.

### Lemon Curd

**A tangy, smooth filling to use as the base for a fresh fruit tart or as a filling on its own**

Use a layer of this as the base for a fresh raspberry or blueberry tart; fill a tart shell with it to make a lemon tart; smear it on shortbread or toast. For lime curd, substitute lime juice and lime zest for the lemon.

#### Lemon Curd

Yields enough to fill one 9-inch pie or one 10-inch tart, about 2 cups.

**3 oz. (6 Tbs.) unsalted butter, at room temperature**  
**1 cup sugar**  
**2 large eggs**  
**2 large egg yolks**  
**⅔ cup fresh lemon juice**  
**1 tsp. grated lemon zest**

In a medium saucepan over low heat, whisk the butter and sugar until well blended. Add eggs and yolks and whisk to blend. Whisk in the lemon juice and zest. Cook over medium-low heat, stirring constantly with a wooden spoon, until the mixture is smooth, thickened, and 170°F, about 15 min. Don't let the mixture boil or it will

curdle. Scrape into a medium bowl and press plastic wrap onto the surface to keep a skin from forming. Refrigerate until well chilled. The curd will keep for a week in the refrigerator or up to 2 months in the freezer.

### Light Pastry Cream

**A classic filling that's great for lining French-style fruit tarts**

Spread a layer of pastry cream inside a shell before you arrange the fresh fruit. To turn it into a creamy pie filling with enough to fill a deeper, American-style pie shell, double everything except the heavy cream.

#### Light Pastry Cream

Yields enough to fill one 9-inch tart, about 2 cups.

**3 large egg yolks**  
**¼ cup sugar**  
**2 Tbs. all-purpose flour**  
**1 cup milk**  
**¾ tsp. vanilla extract**  
**⅓ cup heavy cream, whipped to firm peaks**

In a small bowl, whisk the yolks, sugar, and flour until smooth. Heat the milk in a small saucepan until simmering. Slowly pour the milk into the yolk mixture, whisking constantly, until well blended. Pour the liquid back into the saucepan and bring to a boil over medium heat, whisking constantly. Boil, whisking, until thickened and

the floury taste is cooked off, about 2 min. Scrape the mixture into a small, clean bowl and cover the surface with plastic wrap. Refrigerate until well chilled or up to 2 days. Just before using, whisk the vanilla extract into the pastry cream until blended and smooth and then fold in the whipped cream.

## Toppings

### Crumb Topping

**A topping to add texture to single-crust fruit pies**

#### Crumb Topping

Yields enough to top one 9-inch pie.

**1 cup all-purpose flour**  
**⅔ cup packed brown sugar**  
**1 tsp. ground cinnamon**

**¼ tsp. baking powder**  
**3 oz. (6 Tbs.) unsalted butter, melted and cooled slightly**

In a medium bowl, mix the flour, brown sugar, cinnamon, and baking powder. Add the melted butter and stir with a fork until

crumbs form. Crumble on top of a fruit pie and bake at 425°F for 15 min. Lower the oven to 350°F and bake until the fruit is tender, 40 to 50 min. If the topping is browning too quickly, tent it with foil.

### Nut Topping

**A nutty alternative to crumb topping for fruit pies**

#### Nut Topping

Yields enough to top one 9-inch pie.

**¾ cup all-purpose flour**  
**⅓ cup packed brown sugar**  
**¾ tsp. ground cinnamon**

**4 oz. (8 Tbs.) unsalted butter, cut into pieces and at room temperature**  
**½ cup chopped walnuts, toasted**

In a medium bowl, mix the flour, brown sugar, and cinnamon.

Cut the butter into the flour mixture with a pastry blender until coarse crumbs form. Stir in the nuts. Crumble on top of a fruit pie and bake as above.

### Tart Glaze

**Adds a jewel-like sheen to fresh fruit tarts**

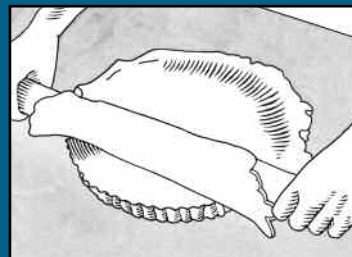
#### Tart Glaze

Yields enough to glaze one 11-inch fruit tart.

**½ cup apple jelly**  
**2 Tbs. Grand Marnier, Framboise, or water**

In a small saucepan, combine the jelly and liqueur or water. Simmer over low heat until fluid. Cool slightly. With a pastry brush, gently brush the glaze onto the tops of the fruit.

## Lining the pan



Unroll the dough from the pin and gently ease it into the pan; take care not to pull or stretch it.



#### For a tart shell:

Trim with scissors, leaving a ½-inch overhang. Fold the overhang down into the pan and press it against the inside of the pan to reinforce the sides of the tart shell. To trim the excess, press the rolling pin against the pan edge and roll it across the pan. Chill for at least 30 min. before baking. (To freeze, wrap in plastic and then in foil; it will keep for up to 2 months.)



#### For a one-crust pie:

Gently but firmly press the dough against the pan sides and bottom, taking care not to pull or stretch it. Trim the dough with scissors, leaving a ¾-inch overhang. Tuck the overhang under itself to shape a high-edge crust that rests on top of the rim, or trim the dough according to the crimping variations (over).

## Egg Wash

Brushed onto an unbaked lattice or double crust, an egg wash gives a subtle sheen to the final baked crust. Yields enough to glaze one 9- or 10-inch pie.

**1 large egg, beaten**  
**2 tsp. water**

Whisk together the egg and water. Brush gently over a lattice- or double-crust pie, or on the rim of a one-crust pie.